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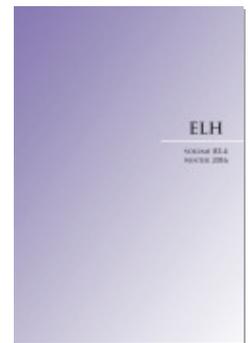
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“NOWHERE’S SAFE”: RUINOUS RECONSTRUCTION IN MURIEL SPARK’S *THE GIRLS OF SLENDER MEANS*

BY KELLY M. RICH

In November 1942, Sir William Beveridge published his *magnum opus*, “Social Security and Its Allied Services,” which introduced a vision of a new welfare state to the British Parliament. The report galvanized the British population, who, having withstood two years of intense bombing, welcomed a vision of postwar peace in the midst of wartime precarity. Selling at least 635,000 copies, this 300-page document produced “the most significant queues of the war” outside His Majesty’s Stationery Office, testifying to its timeliness as, strangely enough, a summary of what Britain had been fighting for all along.¹ Wartime Britain saw a wave of publications on the topic of rebuilding Britain: everyone had an opinion on how to plan the postwar world, with the discourses of art, architecture, sociology, and industrial design using the ruins of the Home Front as an opportunity to imagine a brave new world. If history remembers Britain’s Second World War as its finest hour, it is due not just to its victories on the battlefield, nor to the fortitude of its Home Front, but also, importantly, to the vividly imagined plenitude of its postwar future.

Though reconstruction offers a dense, even overdetermined archive for investigating social change, surprisingly little attention has been paid to its influence on British literary culture. Instead, critics of the Second World War tend to focus on the violence of wartime, consigning any consideration of the postwar period to the conclusion (or more often, coda) of their work.² Yet reconstruction was a predominantly aesthetic discourse, central to wartime culture. Its visions of the future were promoted by *Picture Post*’s issue “A Plan for Britain” (1941), which juxtaposed expert essays with photography and diagrams about healthcare, housing, and education; a series of booklets published by Faber & Faber under the name *Rebuilding Britain*, with titles such as *The War and the Planning Outlook* (1941) and *Civic Design and the Home* (1943); numerous publicity materials by architectural groups and presses; film propaganda; and magazines like the *Daily Mail Book of Post-War Homes*, which featured pull-out centerfolds detailing “the house that women want.”³ It was also the subject of several popular

exhibitions, including 1943's "Rebuilding Britain," organized by the Royal Institute of British Architects; 1946's "Britain Can Make It," organized by the Council of Industrial Design; and of course, the 1951 "Festival of Britain," an event which in many ways marked the culmination of wartime interest in rebuilding Britain. As a discourse invested in postwar futurity, reconstruction rendered what Britain was fighting for, if not concretely, then in concrete: that is, not just self-preservation, but also a better version of itself. It invited the public into the physical structures of welfare state infrastructure, asking them to imagine sleek blocks of flats, modern schools and health centers, and cities built along perfectly planned blueprints. On the one hand, this logic of reconstruction was a straightforward call for continuity, drawing a line from the prewar past to the wartime present and finally to a better postwar Britain. Yet at times it also reflected a more radical call to repair social inequality—a reality exposed by the Blitz as it ripped open buildings, revealing what lurked inside. Wartime violence thus became an occasion to build a "New Jerusalem," a phrase used to capture, as well as market, the need for wide-scale social repair.⁴

For the British novel—a genre historically invested in the fate of everyday, domestic lives—this interest in reconstruction took two forms. The first can be found in Blitz literature's privileging of ruins, a preoccupation of authors such as Elizabeth Bowen, Henry Green, Rose Macaulay, and Graham Greene. Mesmerized by what Greene called the "love-charm" of bombs, these writers used the bomb site to register wartime's heightened emotions, denatured domesticity, and sheer, violent eventfulness, making the ruin as enduring a symbol of the Second World War as the trench was to the First.⁵ Their work critiqued the aesthetics of what Patrick Deer calls official "war culture," which sought to "monopolize representations and interpretations of the conflict"; instead, these authors captured physical pain, ghostly hauntings, pacifist, feminist, and queer thought, and resistance to imperial rhetoric that could not be addressed by the state's cultural productions.⁶ Yet these fictions also echoed the developing sense of the war's productivity, figuring the ruins as an occasion to build a new Britain.⁷ Of course, this revolutionary energy was met with a considerable range of responses, from Bowen's disdainful treatment of the working class to Greene's heralding of apocalyptic justice in "At Home" ("If a cracked cup is put in boiling water it breaks, and an old dog-toothed civilization is breaking now").⁸ However, whether conservative or radical in leaning, the literary consensus was the same: Britain had found democracy amongst the ruins of the Home Front, and, thus found, there could be no going back.

Literature also engaged the discourse of reconstruction through its turn to dystopian fiction, presenting readers with nightmarish visions of Britain's administrated future. Authors such as George Orwell and William Golding (and later, J. G. Ballard and Anthony Burgess) questioned the very nature of Britain's new-found social consensus, asking whether the collective logic of wartime should also have sway over a peacetime society. For these writers, the people of the People's War were already seeped in violence, making any state they built inevitably totalitarian. We might also approach the literature of the Angry Young Men with this regard, reading John Osborne and Alan Sillitoe's claustrophobic renderings of working-class domesticity as provincial, microcosmic dystopias. In these literatures, the collective is always suspect, and welfare infrastructure always tantamount to ruthless social control. Indeed, they posit, if the Second World War taught us anything, it was the British people's ability to organize (and organize well) under the banner of state violence, throwing the very concept of peacetime consensus into immediate question.

As this discussion suggests, the Second World War required British novelists to come to terms with a physically changed world, with regard to both the ruins of war and, more pressingly, the plans for building a postwar peace. We can track these historical changes through the changing social work of the novel, which, in a similar fashion, produced a newly co-visible synthesis of spatial and stylistic reconstruction: hence the Blitz writers' focus on the broken homes of the Home Front, the dystopian attention to infrastructure, and even the kitchen-sink realism of the Angries. This article argues that Muriel Spark occupies a distinctive place in these considerations, as an author who offers an original and compelling reconfiguration of the novel's social function. Critics typically address Spark's work through its ambiguous style, assimilating it within a trajectory of modernism to postmodernism, through reference to her own fraught national and religious identities, or through historicizing her fiction's political referents.⁹ But how might we place Spark within a history of social forms? What does she have to teach us about rebuilding Britain, especially through her restructuring of the novel? Furthermore, how does she do so without recourse to either wartime sentimentalization or dystopian critique, two options which have received considerably more attention, yet remain strangely silent on the realities of the postwar world?

Rather than place faith in war's transformative power, or, conversely, invite a recapturing of non-institutionalized space, Spark insists her readers take stock of how they live now. Her fiction studies what type

of social intimacies are left for those in domestic spaces that, like those of the postwar welfare state, are administrated but not completely totalitarian. Though savage and satirical, Spark does not give up on the idea of society. Indeed, her novels offer insight into diverse social worlds, letting an ethic of cohabitation displace the more recognizable dynamics of familial domesticity. From the schools of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and her final novel *The Finishing School* (2004) to the boarding-houses of *The Girls of Slender Means* and *A Far Cry from Kensington* (1988), from the nursing home in her first novel *The Comforters* (1957) to the abbey of *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), Spark focuses on the problems of communal living, a hallmark of the midcentury transition from warfare to welfare. Yet her texts don't merely recapitulate their social systems. In sharp contrast with Orwell's boot stamping in a face forever, they allow autonomy and individual decisions to matter. Their fictional world is one of surprising betrayals and lingering injuries, keenly felt.¹⁰

As a result, I suggest we read Spark's work in relation to literary modernism's investment in the radical potential (and limitations) of individual connection. Her formal interventions are particularly legible in relation to modernism's response to the vast state failures of the First World War and its aftermath: the nationalist fervor of *pro patria mori*; the stalemate of trench warfare; the lack of adequate care for veterans. In response to these failures, modernist artistic production turned away from structures of official collectivity, instead choosing to value ephemeral, epiphanic forms of interpersonal connection. This uniquely modernist narrative architecture relied on individual interiority and domestic interiors to effect these events of individual sympathy, imagining alternative forms of repair for wartime damage (and ultimately, sociality).

By employing a comparative postwar approach—that is, asking how conditions after the Second World War correspond to aesthetic concerns distinct from those after the First—this article will show how the unusual formal and thematic demands of Spark's fiction upend those of its modernist counterparts, ultimately destroying their physical structures of domesticity while revealing their brand of sympathy to be inaccessible as a postwar structure of feeling. Showing this will clear the way for a new appreciation of Spark's contribution to postwar literature: namely, a literature of reconstruction that critically engages—and ultimately evacuates—the historical valuation and popular memory of Britain's Second World War as the "People's War."

While the jewel of Muriel Spark's *oeuvre* is, at least within literary criticism, the 1961 *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—a novel deeply engaged with the spectacle of fascist authority—I contend that her 1963 *The Girls of Slender Means* has more to teach us about the forces at play in the Second World War and wartime's warping of domestic life. Recounting the fate of "The May of Teck Club," a hostel in wartime London existing "for the Pecuniary Convenience and Social Protection of Ladies of Slender Means," the novel follows a group of girls as they negotiate the pressure to stay "beautiful, graceful, and poised during the lean times of total war."¹¹ Turning its focus away from *Brodie's* "familiar attractions of fascism" (to borrow Judy Suh's formulation) and towards the mechanisms of collectivity, *The Girls of Slender Means* raises the less attractive, but still critical problem of what it means to live together under a welfarist ideology, sharing resources, power, and space.¹²

As its title indicates, *The Girls of Slender Means* plays with the nexus between deprivation and deprivatization, a warfare-to-welfare logic that began with the Beveridge Report and ended with postwar consensus. Set in 1945 between V-E and V-J Day, and against the backdrop of Labour's ascent to power, the novel raises the question of whether a society forged by war would likewise band together under the causes of social welfare. It does so by combining its characters' limited financial means and wartime austerity measures, which are savagely satirized by Spark. The girls pervert the original meaning of state rationing, creating their own systems of control: in the May of Teck Club, deprivation is noble not for its patriotism but as a dieting tool. The novel's title also recalls the dreaded means tests of earlier welfare systems, often a humiliation to those in need of state assistance—a reality powerfully documented by Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Acknowledging popular objection to means tests, the new welfare state clearly defined itself against them, using an egalitarian logic of contribution-based benefits for all rather than free allowances for some.¹³ This is also the financial basis of the May of Teck Club, whose diverse inhabitants pay a small fee for room and board. The Club thus functions as a literary test case for the warfare-to-welfare state, both in its microcosmic likeness and its difference as a quasi-domestic, gendered alternative.

But before focusing on the May of Teck, *The Girls of Slender Means* begins at a national level, signaling a wider critique of 1945 Britain:

Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions. The streets of the cities were lined with buildings in bad repair or no repair at all, bomb-sites in which decay had been drilled out, leaving only the cavity. Some bomb-ripped buildings looked like the ruins of ancient castles until, at a closer view, the wallpapers of various quite normal rooms would be visible, room above room, exposed, as on a stage, with one wall missing; sometimes a lavatory chain would dangle over nothing from a fourth- or fifth-floor ceiling; most of all the staircases survived, like a new art-form, leading up and up to an unspecified destination that made unusual demands on the mind's eye. All the nice people were poor; at least, that was a general axiom, the best of the rich being poor in spirit. (G, 7)

Presenting a spectacle of damaged structures and exposed interior spaces, Spark's opening challenges the idea that war can be socially productive. It does this in part by employing a fairytale tone, satirizing the romance of the war in a manner both familiar and discomfiting. Perhaps more remarkably, the passage enacts its critique through its structure, juxtaposing bland social axioms ("all the nice people . . . were poor") with intricate, intimate descriptions of physical ruins and a wartime landscape devoid of human life. Together, these narrative components confront and ultimately unsettle the familiar understanding of the Second World War as the People's War, and force us to recognize the socially interruptive force of these denuded buildings.¹⁴ The passage's shifting analogies reach towards an apt style of representation to fit the strangeness of the scene, setting in motion what will be the novel's central question about what new art form the war might occasion.

Following the spatial cues of this opening passage, this article proposes that *The Girls of Slender Means* most saliently registers the transition from warfare to welfare through its attention to built space, and its characters' inhabitation of the May of Teck Club. Reading the Club's physical architecture alongside its social structures allows us to see the novel's skeptical engagement with Britain's postwar fantasy of repair, one that imagined that reconstruction—the gleaming schools, health centers, and housing flats of wartime propaganda—would result in new forms of social equality. It will do so using three approaches: first, through a comparative postwar approach, using the work of Virginia Woolf to expose Spark's narrative innovations; second, by bringing the reconstructive logic of *The Girls of Slender Means* into sharper focus; and lastly, by turning to Hilary Mantel's 1995 *Experiment in Love* as an adaptation of Spark's 1963 novel that continues its work for a generation faced with the ruins of the postwar welfare state.

The relationship between British modernism and the First World War is by now well-established. As Paul Fussell, Vincent Sherry, and Sarah Cole have demonstrated, modernist authors responded to the unthinkable catastrophes of war with innovative literary modes, turning to fragmentation, irony, the breakdown of connection and communication, and individual interiority as a way to register and respond to wartime violence.¹⁵ In turn, scholars such as Marina MacKay and Deer identify this nexus as a powerful marker against which to measure the literariness of the Second World War. MacKay's work focuses on the historiographic nature of modernism and WWII: while authors embraced modernist inwardness in relation to the failures of the First World War, authors during the Second World War were more reflexively self-critical, reflecting on Britain's diminution.¹⁶ Deer, likewise, focuses on the newly-national aspects of what he calls the "modern war culture" that developed in the Second World War: rather than rely on modernist fragmentation and irony, this new war culture "offered a modern cultural tradition that claimed to cure and unite the diverse, fragmented spheres of everyday life. But it did so in the name of war, and we are still living with the consequences."¹⁷ This modern war culture notably diverges from Fussell's classic account of modern memory as produced by the First World War, which reflects an ironic structure of events by which optimistic hope ended in ironic catastrophe. We might read WWII's modern war culture as upending this structure, imagining the darkness of war as ending in new forms of social equality. This is one way to begin addressing the differing stakes of the two world wars as engaged through literature: while the First's shattering of the public sphere spurred a modernist ethical retreat to the individual, the Second's will to national unification was harder to wholeheartedly dismiss, and led writers like Spark to consider the new ways the state shapes everyday life.¹⁸

I turn to Woolf as a modernist comparison to Spark because, taken together, these two writers give a compelling account of how domestic architecture structures how we assume ourselves to be inside and outside wartime violence, staging the encounter between these two spheres.¹⁹ Both their fiction and life writings are inextricable from this topic, including Woolf's post-WWI trilogy *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*, as well as her autobiographical essay "A Sketch of the Past" (1939); and Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*, *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), *The Hothouse by the East River*, and her autobiographical *Curriculum Vitae*. In each of these texts, domestic

space provides a powerful index of what effect war has on individual and psychic interior life. In particular, both Woolf and Spark rely on the window to stage their narrative epiphanies, which *The Girls of Slender Means* calls directly into focus:

Windows were important in that year of final reckoning; they told at a glance whether a house was inhabited or not; and in the course of the past years they had accumulated much meaning, having been the main danger-zone between domestic life and the war going on outside: everyone had said, when the sirens sounded, 'Mind the windows. Keep away from the windows. Watch out for the glass.' (G, 8)

As a symbolic threshold between inside and outside, public and private, the window can be read as a way of understanding the changing relationship between domestic interiors, wartime events, and psychological interiority. Laura Marcus locates this window trope as a critical legacy of literary modernism, particularly in reference to the ways Woolf uses the window to suggest "transparency and opacity, connection and separation, clarity and distortion, and the relationship between past and present, or the ways in which the present becomes the past."²⁰ In particular, Victoria Rosner's work on modernism and the architecture of private life has helped to establish a baseline against which Spark's fenestral language comes into relief, particularly in relation to modernist interiority and its relationship to the rich material histories of modernist interior design. However, while Rosner's account of thresholds examines modernist renovations of Victorian domesticity, especially along classed and gendered lines, Spark's windows register a different set of boundaries: namely, the physical, damaging intrusion of the state into the private home, a war no longer going on outside. Through a reading of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel that provides a model of how domestic life engages with thresholds, we can see how *The Girls of Slender Means* presents an acute turn away from the modernist model of psychological and material interiority, especially in relation to wartime violence.

Many readers will remember that *Mrs. Dalloway* uses the window-threshold to stage Clarissa's private epiphany at the end of the novel, as she meditates on the death of Septimus Smith.²¹ The architecture of this epiphany comes earlier, in a scene detailing how the shell-shocked veteran threw himself out his Bloomsbury lodging-house window rather than face another meeting with the ultra-rational Doctor Holmes. However, it is Clarissa who provides the novel's fullest instantiation of the modernist epiphany, in an imagined connection to this

perfect stranger. After writing several permutations of this connection, including bodily echo, vicarious projection, empathetic assertions of similarity, and comparative self-critique, Woolf ends her modernist operation by giving Clarissa the following revelation:

But what an extraordinary night! She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away. The clock was striking. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun. But she must go back. She must assemble. She must find Sally and Peter. And she came in from the little room.²²

This moment is crucially altered in the Hogarth edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which omits what is arguably its cruelest line: “He made her feel the beauty; made her feel the fun.”²³ Despite this editorial discrepancy, Clarissa’s epiphany still relies on a moment of radical sympathy, one that conjures the connective possibilities between two strangers. And yet the scene also falls short of complete connection, as Clarissa returns to her party, to life, refusing to recapitulate Septimus’s deadly fall.

The distinction between these two characters is further enhanced if we attend to each character’s relation to their home spaces and the architecture of their respective interiorities. While the room entraps Septimus, whose only escape is to cross the window’s boundary between life and death, for Clarissa, the little room is still habitable, affording her a room of her own for private, individual contemplation. While domestic objects present themselves as possible suicide tools for Septimus (the knife too clean, the gas time-consuming, the razors packed away, only the window left), for Clarissa they are a source of care, even pleasure: “No pleasure could equal, she thought, straightening the chairs, pushing in one book on the shelf, this having done with the triumphs of youth, lost in the process of living, to find it, with a shock of delight, as the sun rose, as the day sank.”²⁴ And while Septimus’s is a top-down event, escaping from the ministrations of his doctor by throwing himself out from the window, Clarissa’s is a sideways escape into a little adjoining room. We might read this domestic architecture as the very means of her epiphany, catalyzing her imaginative reach out to this stranger as well as her return to her party, two very different forms of hospitality.

This is not to say, of course, that this is Woolf’s celebration of the enabling effects of domesticity: as others have suggested, we can read this scene as a precipitate of Clarissa’s claustrophobia, whether a flight from the stifling boundaries of the home, or inversely, a flight

into interiority contra the terror of an urban environment.²⁵ It is also a moment of some irony. Similar to E. M. Forster's "no, not yet" at the end of *Passage to India*, it signals the potential for radical social connection between two disparate individuals through its very lack.²⁶ Indeed, Clarissa's feeling of gladness is an ironic sign of critique on Woolf's part, as she does not equip her protagonist with the means to see the cruelty of her feelings. Instead, *Mrs. Dalloway* addresses the postwar social fragmentation between civilians and veterans by creating a room of one's own, a critical space-making gesture that cordons off the violence as though sequestering some problem guest. Though the exterior trauma of war shoots through and interrupts the private, interior home space, Clarissa's epiphany ultimately suggests that anything can be domesticated and made interior, possibly even redemptively so, through acts of individual apprehension and sympathy.²⁷ That this assimilation takes place at such a distance from the original event, and that it mediates such a violent precipitate, just shores up the terms of the epiphanic structure and its connective, transformative power.

If the First World War was integral to producing one of the central tenets of literary modernism—namely, the connective possibilities of modernist interiority contra the violent failures of the state—then the violence of the Second World War with its unprecedented Home Front required a reconsideration of the very boundaries between public and private, military and civilian life. Recalling the tableau of stripped buildings that opens *The Girls of Slender Means*, Spark immediately signals the lack of any stable interiority, whether structural or psychic. Likewise, her focus on the Girls, rather than the singular Mrs. Dalloway, signals an emphasis on group experience, institutionalized through the May of Teck Club. As with the Brodie set, a handful of these girls come into focus: Selina, the slenderest and most savage; Joanna, a rector's daughter and Selina's pious, morally upright foil; and Jane, a plump, bookish girl, this novel's version of *Brodie's* Sandy Stranger. Yet compared to *Brodie*, *The Girls of Slender Means* analogizes social differentiation using institutional space. Devoting a considerable amount of time to an architectural blueprint of the Club, we find that its organization neatly maps onto the social status of the girls. From the first floor's young, schoolgirl virgins, the second floor staff and temporary members, the third floor old maids, and the fourth floor's sophisticated coterie, the novel makes it difficult to imagine any roundedness in these characters, any side rooms affording interior, modernist, individual epiphanies.

These changes to the structure of the novel blast open a modernist

architecture of interiority and connection and sharply qualify the power of its narrative epiphany. Rather than have the grounds of this epiphany be squarely intersubjective (that is, the imagined connection between Septimus and Clarissa), it relies on what we might call the Club's infrastructural elements: a lavatory window, whose bars admit the passage of only the thinnest girls in its own slender means test; a taffeta Schiaparelli dress, the Club's one object of luxury that circulates for special occasions, and which also only fits the slimmest of girls; and the "Two Sentences" from Selina's correspondence "Poise Course," which the top-floor girls respectfully listen to every morning and evening ("Poise is perfect balance, an equanimity of body and mind, complete composure whatever the social scene. Elegant dress, immaculate grooming, and perfect deportment all contribute to the attainment of self-confidence" [G, 50]). These shared elements combine in the most horrific of ways at the end of the novel, when a bomb—dropped years earlier in the Blitz—explodes belatedly in the garden, causing the May of Teck Club to catch fire. The top floor girls are trapped by this fire, unable to escape except through a lavatory window leading onto an adjacent roof. Dramatically, this is the very window the girls had used to test their slimness, and which only some, still, can succeed in squeezing through. The elegant Selina, of course, is able to slither through to safety. As her fellow housemates stand trapped, waiting in fear and anticipation, Selina returns through the lavatory window, moving back into the smoke and din:

She was carrying something fairly long and limp and evidently light in weight, enfolding it carefully in her arms. He thought it was a body. She pushed her way through the girls coughing delicately from the first waves of smoke that had reached her in the passage. The others stared, shivering only with their prolonged apprehension, for they had no curiosity about what she had been rescuing or what she was carrying. She climbed up on the lavatory seat and slid through the window, skilfully and quickly pulling her object behind her. Nicholas held up his hand to catch her. When she landed on the roof-top she said, 'Is it safe out here?' and at the same time was inspecting the condition of her salvaged item.

Poise is perfect balance. It was the Schiaparelli dress. The coat-hanger dangled from the dress like a headless neck and shoulders.

'Is it safe out here?' said Selina.

'Nowhere's safe,' said Nicholas. (G, 125)

Spark masterfully draws this into a suspended moment in time, so we can feel the force of its revelation and the extent of its savagery.

In a sort of delayed decoding, the narrator obscures the actual object until the very end, prolonging our own apprehension of what it could be: the naming of the object moves from the neutral “something fairly long and limp and evidently light in weight” to the hopeful “[h]e thought it was a body,” then to the indeterminate “what she had been rescuing”/“what she was carrying.” And when Selina reaches the rooftop, though Nicholas can surely see the dress, it’s still registered as a nondescript object: the fact that it is not identified as such speaks to the trauma of the event, his inability to take it all in. It takes a strong narrative intrusion to finally name the object for what it is. Though the multiple namings of the object are reminiscent of the various permutations of Clarissa’s modernist epiphany, here they don’t afford space for flights of sympathetic imagination, but rather lead to a singular, horrifying revelation. Here there’s no little side room to retreat to, and no returning to the party: Spark reverses the epistemology of the window so that the danger is within the domestic structure, and the safety seems to be in the world outside. With no division between domestic life and state violence, the home implodes soon after, sinking into its center and killing one of the Girls. But it is Selina’s decision to return for the dress that gives this moment its true horror. Her action makes the window a two-directional portal between danger and safety, adding another layer of porosity and precarity so that, as Nicholas’s final line suggests, nowhere’s safe.

The event not only ruins the Club, but also reveals the Club’s sociability to be rotten—and perhaps to have been rotten all along. For this epiphanic event is witnessed through the eyes of Nicholas Farrington, a civil servant and aspiring writer who is infatuated by the girls of slender means, especially the carefully poised Selina. Just as Septimus does for Clarissa, the girls make Nicholas feel the beauty and the fun of life, compared to the boredom of his slowly concluding war work.²⁵ Upon meeting them, he begins to craft a “poetic image” (*G*, 65) of the Club as a “miniature expression of a free society . . . held together by the graceful attributes of a common poverty” (*G*, 84–85). His transition from the work of war to an interest in the girls’ welfare is motivated as much by boredom as idealism, the winding down of the war machine creating not a postwar euphoria or even complacency, but rather a situation of arduous work, bleak rooms, and a need for new preoccupation. While the girls have no such pretensions or fascination with their own lives, Nicholas insists on reading them as a microcosm of an ideal community. The novel’s epiphany reveals the true nature of the Club to Nicholas, undoing his vision of a community made sympathetic by

common poverty. Witnessing this savage act of salvage and betrayal, he surreptitiously makes a sign of the cross, converting to Catholicism then and there. As he later concludes in his personal notebooks, “A vision of evil may be as effective to conversion as a vision of good” (G, 140). Nicholas’s epiphany is thus also a negative one: where Septimus makes Clarissa feel the beauty, fun, and new sympathetic openness precipitated by the news of his death, here, Nicholas’s belief in the Girls crumbles, as the house he built up in his mind comes figuratively and literally tumbling down. Rather than suggest the potentiality of interpersonal connection, this postwar epiphany is experienced as a painful break, a crisis of connection in ruins.

II. ON REPAIR: FROM RUINS TO RECONSTRUCTION

So much for all the nice people of the Second World War; as it promised, the novel reveals an exception to this rule, neatly mirroring the rule’s polarizing logic through a damning reversal of good and evil. What it leaves unresolved, however, is the challenge of the novel’s opening description, to find a new art form within the ruins of the Blitz. A comparison to modernism and the First World War can only take us so far: while it helps give insight to changing mores of human character and interpersonal connection, it is unable to account for the more proximate, infrastructural damages that shape *The Girls of Slender Means*. The novel, too, is not satisfied to end with Selina’s betrayal. Instead, it concludes with a series of nested endings, a protracted coda that includes the ascent of the Labour government, London’s celebration of V-J Day, and a final nod to the recurring present-day frame narrative. What I want to focus on, however, is Spark’s return to the scene of the club, a gesture of mourning and remembrance of Joanna’s fiery fall. Up until this point, the novel has challenged the mythos of wartime Britain and the ennobling effects of violence, participating in a form of historiographic reconstruction. However, in its final pages, it makes a marked turn to the concept of physical reconstruction, which until now has remained merely foreshadowed.

As recent studies have shown, British late modernism reflects a marked inward turn, perceptible in the rising discourses of home anthropology examined in Jed Esty’s *A Shrinking Island*, and the self-critical national historiography examined in MacKay’s *Modernism and World War II*. Postwar reconstruction, I propose, offers yet another version of this inward turn, perhaps even its endgame. In the quest to plan a postwar Britain, the literature of domestic reconstruction

toggled between a desire for conservation and radical transformation, a dialectic that would continue to influence the formation of the postwar welfare state. However, what is shared is an acknowledgment of the vast damage incurred by wartime Britain, which, as Spark herself indicates, required new interpretive and representational demands. This aestheticization of violence sits uneasily with the reality of wartime damage, especially as injury was the catalyst of political change. If, as Mark Rawlinson explains, “[m]aterial events of military conflict, notably lethal wounding, require symbolization and discursive mediation if war is to function as an instrument of political policy,” then we should be equally cognizant of the politics of postwar repair, which rely on tableaux of ruined buildings in order to underscore the need for reconstruction—more so, even, than bodies in pain.²⁹ Indeed, the absence of the wounded body seems a prerequisite to postwar reconstruction: after all, it is difficult to move forward when reminded of the claims of the dead.³⁰ To a certain degree, *The Girls of Slender Means* challenges this by reinserting the wounded body back into the landscape, puncturing the generic optimism of “long ago in 1945” with the particular horrors of Joanna’s death (*G*, 7). Yet her death is ultimately superseded by an attention to the remains of the Club, and the signification of their ruinous spatiality.

When Spark brings us to the site of the Club, she does so not through its former inhabitants, but through Nicholas and Joanna’s father, the rector. Rather than using the narrator’s sardonic voice to set the scene, Spark sets up this ruin-gazing as a moment of potential revelation for the two men, who have returned to gain closure for Joanna’s death. Up until now, the two men have circled awkwardly around the subject of Joanna: an awkwardness exacerbated by the fact that Nicholas lost her recorded recitation of “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” the only material testament left to her existence.³¹ Without this last evidentiary trace of Joanna, Nicholas and her father return to the ruined Club, not just for closure but also, we feel, for empathetic traction. We might read this contemplation of ruins as a version of Woolf’s sideways, modernist room, giving the two men a chance to reflect upon Joanna’s death, and setting up a potential moment of real connection. Upon arrival to the site, they find this tableau:

They came to the site of the May of Teck Club. It looked now like one of the familiar ruins of the neighbourhood, as if it had been shattered years ago by a bomb-attack, or months ago by a guided missile. The paving stones of the porch lay crookedly leading nowhere. The pillars

lay like Roman remains. A side wall at the back of the house stood raggedly at half its former height. Greggje's garden was a heap of masonry with a few flowers and rare plants sprouting from it. The pink and white tiles of the hall lay in various aspects of long neglect, and from a lower part of the ragged side wall a piece of brown drawing-room wall-paper furled more raggedly. (G, 137)

This description of the Club's site harkens back to the novel's descriptive opening lines, giving us a blasted ruin site to read in all of its stripped-apart detail. Now, however, the ruins are no longer generic, but familiar: instead of the staircases to nowhere, we have the particular paving stones of the porch; instead of the "wallpapers of various quite normal rooms," we have the brown drawing-room wall-paper, whose color, we know, was fiercely detested by the Girls. Spark personalizes the postwar landscape of damage, making its details diegetically resonant and forcing us to confront our own attachment to the May of Teck Club. Notably, she also largely omits the narrator's metafictional commentary that was woven through the opening: rather than characterize ruin-gazing as viewing a stage or a new art form, her description is flatter, barer. This then raises the question: is this damage now mere damage, without the figurative pretensions of artistry and the enchantments of violence? Or does *The Girls of Slender Means* now figure as the new art form, performing its novel literariness through our reading of it? Furthermore, if the novel's previous epiphany taught us that a vision of evil is equally persuasive as one of good, what, if anything, is the vision of ruins supposed to catalyze in us? One answer can be found in the characters' own response to the ruins of the May of Teck:

Joanna's father stood holding his wide black hat.

At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows,

The rector said to Nicholas. 'There's really nothing to see.'

'Like my tape-recording,' said Nicholas.

'Yes, it's all gone, all elsewhere.' (G, 137)

This ghostly remnant of the Club offers a different form of Spark's negative epiphany: an emptiness, or refusal of epiphany. The rector's impersonal, exaggerated language also suggests the wider ramifications of this disappearance: rather than a personalized loss of the individual Joanna, his words reflect the impossibility of the Club itself, and the eviscerated idealism Nicholas attached to its sociality. Perhaps the only consolation Spark gives us is that unlike Clarissa Dalloway's feeling of gladness at Septimus's suicide, such affirmation is impossible in *The*

Girls of Slender Means. Instead, these ruins of war resist being made interior or domesticated, letting ruins, as it were, be ruins.

This provides a stark challenge to those seeking meaning in ruins, whether it be consolation, sublimity, catharsis, or a catalyst of mourning. Indeed, as the rector's conclusion suggests, it challenges the impulse to represent the ruins at all. By suggesting there's nothing there to see, Joanna's father offers a commentary on Britain's wartime self-mythologizing, and the transformation of the Second World War into Britain's "People's War." *The Girls of Slender Means* uses the ruins of the Club to access this historiographic national consciousness, only to conclude that it may be kenomatic, the mythology of the People's War founded on an emptiness. Yet unlike Selina's dramatic betrayal, this moment reads more like a disappointment, a muted iteration of the previous fiery spectacle. The characters find an uneasy peace in this emptiness, relieved of the burden to find redemption or retrospective plenitude in the ruins.

An even more obvious variation of Spark's refusal of the narrative epiphany can be found in her later novel *The Hothouse by the East River*, published in 1973. Set in postwar New York, the novel follows the disturbing and dreamlike lives of its two main characters, who as it emerges, were killed by a V2 bomb years ago in 1944 wartime London. Yet the protagonists cannot accept this fact until their home space is physically destroyed, demolished to make way for a new block of apartments:

They stand outside their apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. The upper stories are already gone and the lower part is a shell. A demolition truck waits for the new day's shift to begin. The morning breeze from the East River is already spreading the dust.

Elsa stands in the morning light reading the billboard. It announces the new block of apartments to be built on the site of the old.

"Now we can have some peace," says Elsa.³²

Peace for the dead, perhaps, but also peace for the living: both *The Hothouse by the East River* and *The Girls of Slender Means* express a wariness of the uncanny, vivifying power the War holds for both its characters and its readers. Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means* critiques both the reparative logic of social reconstruction as well as the historiographic reconstruction of the Second World War as Britain's finest hour. It asks us to consider that to live in this myth may be outstaying one's welcome, tantamount to occupying a home already slotted for destruction. Put differently, it may be the very overvaluation of war

that is war's unfinished business, and the source of cultural unrest.

Despite her literary skewering of WWII and its history's mythical hold, Spark's autobiography *Curriculum Vitae* fully participates in a rose-tinted reevaluation of the war. Like many authors, Spark actively did her part for WWII Britain, finding work in a black propaganda unit headed by Sefton Delmar. Yet she was also a generation younger than authors such as Orwell, Bowen, Waugh, and Greene, and unlike them, not yet established on the literary scene. As a younger, working, middle-class woman just starting out in the world, Spark lacked cultural (and actual) capital, and as *Curriculum Vitae* shows, thought of the war as both an escape from a stifling marriage and as a way to gain much-desired life experience. In her chapters on the war, Spark speaks of her experience at the Helena Club, a lodging-house for "Ladies from Good Families of Modest Means who are Obligated to Pursue an Occupation in London."³³ While recognizably the origin of the fictional May of Teck, Spark has only the kindest things to say about the Helena Club as a memoirist, calling it "absolutely charming" and ruled by "a presiding angel," Mrs. G. S. Taylor (who wrote affectionately to Spark upon reading the novel).³⁴ Combining the resiliency and luck of youth with the familiar trappings of the People's War, Spark's autobiography challenges the reader of *The Girls of Slender Means*, their affective registers being nearly irreconcilable.

However, there is one evident overlap between the two Clubs: namely the strange, almost inconceivable fact of their complete physical demise. Compared to the May of Teck, the Helena Club was destroyed not by a bomb, but rather by a postwar "course of total reconstruction, probably to make a hotel."³⁵ Spark is clearly shaken by this complete transformation in *Curriculum Vitae*, noting: "I had stayed so often in that club in Lancaster Gate, it seemed incredible that it was no more."³⁶ This incredulity is one of the few signs Spark gives as to the losses of the Second World War in her autobiography, a marked inversion point where her cheerful Keep Calm and Carry On manner gives way to a colder reality. While this moment doesn't make recourse to the black humor or total devastation that characterizes Spark's fiction, the Helena Club's destruction nevertheless signals the need for a new style of representation, one that she refuses to engage in the space of her autobiography. We might read Spark's fiction as taking on this task, as the new art form that, like Joanna, finds the right words for the event. Indeed, if we return to the language of the novel's secondary epiphany, we find it is not entirely negative: though Joanna's father characterizes the ruins as nothing to see, he also notes that while it's

all gone, it's also all elsewhere. This should give us pause, for where else might it (Joanna, the Girls, the Club, idealism) be?

Spark's answer can be found in the floating poetic fragment that interrupts the language of the empty epiphany, a line from John Drinkwater's "Moonlit Apples" that Joanna used in her recitations: "At the top of the house the apples are laid in rows." The entire novel is overlaid with these fractured poeticisms, some directly attributed to Joanna's elocution lessons, while others are purely literary utterances unattached to character (or even, it seems, narrator). This particular line, of course, is no random choice: like Joanna's habit of choosing "the words for the right day," it recalls and even metaphorizes The May of Teck Club, gently reconstructing the prior trauma of the rooftop into a quiet domestic scene (*G*, 128). It also provides a remarkable contrast to Nicholas's lost recording of Joanna reciting "The Wreck of the Deutschland," not only in content, but more hauntingly, in form. Here, the individual Joanna has been replaced by the work of the novel, which remembers her through a fragmentary, yet reconstructive, gesture. As this poetic interruption demonstrates, while material structures may crumble and fade away, the space of literature can house epiphanic moments, crystallizing them through figurative language that is mobile, iterable, and translatable. *The Girls of Slender Means* stretches these loci of wartime damage, taking the long view of ruins repaired, reconstructed, and repurposed. It takes into account archaeology of structures that we have come to inhabit, and whose history we have perhaps forgotten as we move further away from the Second World War.

III. CODA: HILARY MANTEL'S *EXPERIMENT IN LOVE*

Though largely overlooked in the literary and critical canon, *The Girls of Slender Means* has enjoyed a degree of popularity, testified to by its numerous adaptations as a radio play (1965), a three-episode mini-series for BBC TV (1975), and most recently, a theatrical version by Judith Adams (2009). Each adaptation has had to negotiate the novel's alternating viewpoints and historical vantage points: the radio play, for instance, presents *The Girls of Slender Means* as Nicholas's autobiography, doing away with an omniscient narrator and relying instead on him; the television drama tints BBC stock footage of the Blitz in sepia to underscore the storybook "long ago in 1945."³⁷ However, the most compelling transformation of Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means* is not its translation to stage, screen, or sound. Instead, it can

be found in Mantel's 1995 novel *An Experiment in Love*, a direct rewriting of Spark's novel and an uncannily faithful extension of it for the next generation of girls of slender means. In an interview from 1998, Mantel notes that while many critics in Britain say she was influenced by Spark, she finds Spark's Catholicism (and her own lack of religious faith) to differentiate them, finding more "fellow-feeling" with her contemporary Margaret Atwood.³⁸ Likewise, the protagonist of Mantel's early novel *An Experiment in Love* eschews any relationship to Spark's 1963 novel, concluding, "We haven't the class for Girls of Slender Means."³⁹ Nevertheless, *An Experiment in Love* can be read as closely negotiating with, even rewriting Spark's novel.

Focusing on a group of young women in Tonbridge Hall, a residence hall in a London university, *An Experiment in Love* details the color of the girls' everyday lives, the austere discomforts of their communal living situation, and the minute oscillations between betrayal and care that characterize girl sociality for Mantel. Like the perverse relationship introduced between slenderness and wartime rationing in *The Girls of Slender Means*, Mantel's novel focuses on the girls' eating habits and what is allotted to them by the state, creating a complex amalgam of wanting as both desire and lack. In particular, her protagonist Carmel McBain develops an anorexia intimately bound to her position as a working-class scholarship girl, as pride, discipline, and shame profoundly shape what she allows herself to eat, on top of what little she can afford to. But the most obvious rewriting of Spark's novel occurs in the novel's climax, in which the residence hall goes up in flames; a girl dies a terrible death as the others watch, huddled in safety outside; and a precious fox-fur coat is salvaged by Karina, Carmel's childhood friend and enemy. Even the mechanisms of this epiphany are familiar. The fox fur is once again revealed by delayed decoding ("She was holding something over her arm; it was a strange draping softness, something limp and slaughtered. My hand crept out to it: Lynette's fox fur" [E, 245]); the death is staged at the window ("Outlined against a window, I saw a single figure; a silhouette, a blackness against red. It was Lynette. I knew her at once: I would have known her anywhere" [E, 242]).

What I want to highlight here, however, is not just that Hilary Mantel rewrites *The Girls of Slender Means*, but more importantly, that Mantel continues Spark's work beyond its time, translating and updating it for the next generation of readers. While Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means* was positioned to destroy the myth of wartime sociality that underwrote the formation of the postwar welfare state,

Mantel's *An Experiment in Love* was positioned to mourn its demise, situated after the end of the Thatcher era and its dismantlement of welfare programs. Like Spark, Mantel is very canny about her literary historiography, setting her work as a retrospective on an origin story: just as the narrative action of *The Girls of Slender Means* looks back to the 1945 ascent of Labour, *An Experiment in Love* looks back to the 1970 ascent of the Tories, capturing a naïve time with the plenitude of perspective.⁴⁰ As Mantel recounts in the opening pages:

It was the year after Chappaquiddick, the year Julia and I first went away from home. All spring I had dreamt about the disaster, and remembered the dreams when I woke: the lung tissue and water, the floating hair and sucking cold. In London that summer the temperatures shot into the mid-eighties, but at home the weather was as usual: rain most days, misty dawns over our dirty canal and cool damp evenings on the lawns of country pubs where we went with our boyfriends: sex later in the clammy, dewy dark. In June there was an election, and the Tories got in. It wasn't my fault; I wasn't old enough to vote. (*E*, 2)

Like Spark's opening onto 1945, these lines orient us not only in a specific time and place, but also in a specific social sensibility. However, unlike the satirical "nice people in England," Mantel immediately begins with a collective, girlish "we": one that, by the late 1960s, is both in charge of its sexuality and rather uneasy about it. This girlishness also has an uneasy relationship to politics: not only is it too young to vote, and therefore politically passive, but as the Chappaquiddick reference suggests, it is also intensely precarious, even disposable. If Senator Ted Kennedy could shake off the death of his colleague Mary Jo Kopechne, so too, the reference suggests, might government drop its duty of due care for young women, leaving them behind to drown in their own quiet disasters.⁴¹ In a way similar to Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, *An Experiment in Love* seeks to give voice to those subjects excluded, sometimes violently so, from being given an account in official politics and culture.⁴² It is a deeply sociological book, one that takes the material formation of societies seriously, even of girls of slender means.

Of course, Mantel's novel is not mere mourning for welfare ideology, just as Spark's novel is not mere indictment. A large part of *An Experiment in Love* shows welfare's uneven effects, as felt by the protagonist in relation to both her working-class family and her various classmates as she becomes more upwardly mobile. *An Experiment In Love* continues to reveal these class-based fault lines, so strikingly

incongruent to Britain's self-narrative of rising postwar equality. Indeed, in her reminiscence about her scholarship days, Carmel directly associates her new schoolmates' affluence with the early postwar period: "When I think of the early lives of these girls—of Julianne, let us say—I think of starched sun-bonnets, Beatrix Potter, of mossy garden paths, regular bedtime, regular bowels: I see them frozen for ever in that unreclaimable oasis between the war and the 1960s, between the end of rationing and the beginning of the end" (*E*, 124). One way to gloss the title of the novel, then, is to read it as a reference to the welfare state itself, being an experiment in love that—as the novel bears out—does not turn out to be a striking success. These class divides ultimately lead to the tragedy of the novel: Karina's theft of the precious fox-fur coat. What's more, we learn that Karina locked her roommate Lynette in their room, leaving Lynette to perish while she escaped to safety. This escalation of violence suggests a cold prediction, one in which the divisive energies of welfare and its aspirations actually destroy social cohesiveness.

Yet unlike *The Girls of Slender Means*, this violence does not provide the negative epiphanic spark of the novel. Instead, Mantel's epiphany occurs in a moment of radical connection between Carmel and Karina. Just as the enormity of Karina's crime dawns on Carmel, a wind rises and pastes Karina's nightdress to her body, revealing a pregnant belly about five to six months gone. This catalyzes a flashback to an earlier scene where Carmel viciously kicked Karina's baby-doll, an event that turned their easy, innocent friendship into one of jealousy, comparison, and ambivalence. This remembrance leads Carmel to decide not to give Karina away, a complicit and perverse act of repair. The novel ends with the two girls linking hands and running away from the dormitory fire, a moment of almost inconceivable defiance, alliance, and tenderness. *An Experiment in Love* thus gives one more turn to Spark's negative postwar epiphany, moving along a dialectic of care and harm, connection and disconnection. It proposes that, while welfare might be a failed experiment in one particular kind of love—the "all the nice people" postwar thesis of warfare to welfare—it might also create other forms of love, unanticipated by its initial planners as well as its detractors. As Carmel queries: "It struck me that perhaps Tonbridge Hall was drawing us together: who is my neighbour?" (*E*, 201). I read *An Experiment in Love* as both inhabitant and neighbor of Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*, living within its novelistic infrastructure while also carrying out a duty of literary care for the questions and problems created therein. If, as James Vernon suggests, "[s]ocial theorists may

talk of the death of the social, yet we still inhabit its increasingly shabby infrastructure,” Spark and Mantel testify to this.⁴³ Though Spark’s criticism of 1945 may eviscerate wartime nationalism and the mythology of postwar repair, it doesn’t leave us with nothing to see: instead, it creates a literary space that future novelists can inhabit, and that we all, to some degree, have inherited.

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NOTES

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¹Valerie Holman, *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England, 1939–1945* (London: British Library, 2008), 194.

²See, for instance, Patrick Deer, “The Boom Ends,” in *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 235–42; Jenny Hartley, “Post-war Post-script,” in *Millions Like Us: British Women’s Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Virago, 1997), 198–204; and Marina MacKay, “Coda: National historiography after the post-war settlement,” *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 142–55. A notable exception can be found in Mark Rawlinson’s third chapter, “‘What targets for a bomb’: Spectacle, Reconstruction and the London Blitz,” in *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 68–109.

³M. Pleydell-Bouverie, *Daily Mail Book of Post-War Homes* (London: Daily Mail, 1944), 22. The centerfolds, facing pages 24 and 56, unfold into large, color-printed floor plans of the ideal home based on a “nation-wide consensus of (women’s) opinion” (Pleydel-Bouverie, 22). The pictures were meant as a substitute for seeing the real thing in Britain’s annual “Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition,” which was suspended during wartime: as the author notes, “[A]s war conditions make such things impossible you are invited to make your inspection through the following pages” (Pleydel-Bouverie, 22). For a thorough listing detailing publicity material by architectural groups and presses, see Peter Larkham and Keith Lilley, *Planning the ‘City of Tomorrow’: British Reconstruction Planning, 1939–52: An Annotated Bibliography* (Pickering: Inch’s Books, 2001), 57–62. See also Holman, “Publishing for Peace (1944–1945),” in *Print for Victory*, 193–245.

⁴See Holman, 194, and MacKay, 24–27.

⁵Graham Greene, “At Home,” in *Collected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), 336. Greene writes: “The nightly routine of sirens, barrage, the probing raider, the unmistakable engine (‘Where are you? Where are you? Where are you?’), the bomb-bursts moving nearer and then moving away, hold one like a love-charm” (336). The obsession with ruins also continues to animate contemporary treatments of the Second World War, with authors such as Ian McEwan and Sarah Waters reworking the Blitz as a metafictional technique, or a way to investigate alternative sexualities.

For critical discussions of Blitz literature and the figure of the ruin, see Leo Mellor's proleptic modernism in *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011); and David Alworth's concept of "logic of the ruin" in "Pynchon's Malta," *Post-45*, 1 October 2012, <http://post45.research.yale.edu/2012/10/pynchons-malta/>.

⁶ Deer, 4.

⁷ This modernity was also clearly reflected in the field of architecture and architectural modernism, though as art historian Elizabeth Darling suggests, this movement had its roots in the 1920s–30s, concurrent with literary modernism. See Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of Modernity Before Reconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁸ Greene, 336.

⁹ A recent example of this can be found in David Herman's introduction to the 2008 *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on Muriel Spark. See David Herman, "'A Salutary Scar': Muriel Spark's Desegregated Art in the Twenty-First Century," *Modern Fiction Studies* 54.3 (2008): 473–86.

¹⁰ In this way, I diverge slightly from MacKay's reading of the influence of Catholicism on *The Girls of Slender Means*, which suggests that Spark's "savage ironising of comforting national mythology can be explained and domesticated by the religious principles underlying her scepticism about a secular version of the New Jerusalem" (Mackay, 145).

¹¹ Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (New York: New Directions, 1998), 9. Hereafter abbreviated *G* and cited parenthetically by page number.

¹² Judy Suh, "The Familiar Attractions of Fascism in Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.2 (2007): 86.

¹³ See Sir William Beveridge, "Social Insurance and Allied Services" (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1942), 11–12; and Virginia Noble, *Inside the Welfare State: Foundations of Policy and Practice in Post-War Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.

¹⁴ See Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969). Calder would later write the self-corrective *The Myth of the Blitz* (1991) which, as Julian Symons points out, still never quite manages to shake the mythos associated with the Second World War. See Symons, "The brief possibility of a different history," *London Review of Books* 13.17 (1991): 9.

¹⁵ See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000); Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); and Sarah Cole, *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Also see Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Deer, 6.

¹⁸ Despite the deeply critical, pacifist stances that characterized many artists' reactions to the First World War, several mid-century writers made what MacKay characterizes as "the guilty compromise" of supporting the Second (10). Several now-canonical authors did extraordinary service for the wartime state in the Second World War, including George Orwell and his broadcasts for the BBC's Eastern Service, Elizabeth Bowen's spying on neutral Ireland for Churchill, Evelyn Waugh's military service in Marine and commando units, and Greene's recruitment by MI6 for work in Sierra Leone. Such direct war service had a discernible influence on these authors' fiction, which reflects a marked preoccupation with changing nature of private life under wartime, and the ruination, repurposing, or sheer obliteration of the homes of the Home Front.

¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, of course, provides the paragon modernist example, for as Victoria Rosner avers, “No other major novelist of the period was so preoccupied with the critique of Victorian domesticity or so explicit about the relationship of literary modernism to the changing nature of private life” (*Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2005], 15).

²⁰ Laura Marcus, “The Legacies of Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 95.

²¹ This moment is also critically triangulated by the appearance of the old lady in the opposite room, who like Septimus, we have encountered earlier in the narrative. Clarissa is taken by the woman, watching her as she gets ready for bed. We might read this as a vision of her future self, a quieter spectacle of death in the midst of the party. However, the figure of the old lady does not offer the same quotient of epiphanic transformation as Septimus, instead generating an observational, even descriptive mode: “It was fascinating, with people still laughing and shouting in the drawing-room, to watch that old woman, quite quietly, going to bed.” (Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* [New York: Harcourt, 1981], 185).

²² Woolf, 186.

²³ Molly Hoff, *Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway: Invisible Presences* (Clemson: Clemson Univ. Digital Press, 2009), 235.

²⁴ Woolf, 185.

²⁵ See Anthony Vidler, “Bodies in Space/Subjects in the City: Psychopathologies of Modern Urbanism,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 5.3 (1993): 31–51; and Rosner, 149–50.

²⁶ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (New York: Harvest, 1984), 322.

²⁷ Think also of the bracketed war in *To the Lighthouse's* “Time Passes,” or the fraught inheritance of Jacob's shoes in *Jacob's Room*. See Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 133–34; and *Jacob's Room* (New York: Harcourt, 1978), 176.

²⁸ As Spark writes, “Winding-up was arduous, it involved the shuffling of papers and people from office to office; particularly it involved considerable shuffling between the British and American Intelligence pockets in London. He had a bleak furnished room at Fulham. He was bored” (*G*, 60).

²⁹ Rawlinson, 4.

³⁰ This shift of focus from the wounded body to the damaged building as the icon of postwar repair reflects a marked difference between the aftermaths of World War I's mourning culture and World War II's welfarist, planning imagination. See Peter Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2006), 122.

³¹ Lyndsey Stonebridge's reading of *The Girls of Slender Means* underscores the pivotal role the voice plays in the Girls' group psychology. To Stonebridge, even if Nicholas was able to retrieve Joanna's voice, Spark's novel ultimately suggests he wouldn't be able to hear it: he is too busy imposing his own ideal of the Club onto its actual inhabitants. See Stonebridge, “Hearing Them Speak: Voices in Wilfred Bion, Muriel Spark and Penelope Fitzgerald,” *Textual Practice* 19 (2005): 445–65.

³² Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 146.

³³ Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: A Volume of Autobiography* (New Directions, 2011), 138.

³⁴ Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 138.

³⁵ Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 139. Today, the club exists as residential, luxury flats complete with gym, spa, and swimming pool. See <http://idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk/online-applications/propertyDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=LITPKERPOZM00>

³⁶ Spark, *Curriculum Vitae*, 139. Another notable autobiographical account of wartime home spaces is her essay “The Poet’s House,” first broadcasted on the BBC Home Service on 7 July 1960, recounting a chance encounter with the house of Louis MacNiece during World War II. Like *Curriculum Vitae*, it contains none of the satirical flash or devastating wit of her fiction. Indeed, asked why she became a writer, Spark offered, “I think I must have felt that by some sympathetic magic I could draw from the poet’s possessions some essence which would enable me to get down to my writing,” with the house becoming “a symbol of what I was to attempt to make of my life” (Spark, “The Poet’s House,” in *The Informed Air: Essays*, ed. Penelope Jardine [New York: New Directions, 2014], 23).

³⁷ See “BBC radio script by Christopher Holme, with letter, 1965, of Christopher Holme,” Accession 10989/97, Muriel Spark Archive, National Library of Scotland; and “BBC television rehearsal script by Ken Taylor, 1975,” Accession 10989/98-100, Spark Archive.

³⁸ Rosario Arias and Hilary Mantel, “An Interview with Hilary Mantel,” *Atlantis* 20.2 (1998): 282.

³⁹ Mantel, *An Experiment in Love* (New York: Picador, 1995), 18. Hereafter abbreviated *E* and cited parenthetically by page number.

⁴⁰ Margaret Thatcher herself even makes a cameo appearance near the end of the novel as Secretary of State, being the guest at Tonbridge Hall’s Guest Night banquet: unsurprisingly, the girls twitter at her, and she is described as wearing a dress “of the shape that is called ageless, and of a length that is called safe,” with hair in curves “like unbaked sausage rolls” (*E*, 216).

⁴¹ Mary Jo Kopechne was part of her own girl posse: the “boiler-room girls,” a group of young women helping with Robert F. Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign (“Who’s Who at the Kennedy Inquest,” *TIME* 9.10 [1969], <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901341-4,00.html>).

⁴² Carolyn Kay Steedman’s work is particularly relevant here, especially regarding Mantel’s characters and their constant negotiation with envy for material things, which Steedman locates as a central, legitimate structure of feeling for working-class women. See Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987).

⁴³ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), 276. He elaborates: “[The] material world provided by postwar social democratic welfare states, just as in Britain the new hospitals and schools of the welfare state were frequently housed in the old workhouses” (Vernon, “Hunger, the Social, and States of Welfare in Modern Imperial Britain,” *Occasion* 2 [2010], <http://arcade.stanford.edu/occasion/hunger-social-and-states-welfare-modern-imperial-britain>).