

Love in Conflict: D.E. Stevenson, War-time Romance Fiction, and *The English Air*

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ABSTRACT

D.E. Stevenson was a 20th century Scottish novelist writing romance fiction before, during, and after World War II. By analyzing her life and dissecting the genre's formulaic properties, I will show how *The English Air* is representative of the ways some women coped with the eras of conflict of the two World Wars. In a critical analysis of the novel itself, I will show how Stevenson's attention to Anglo-German relations propels it beyond a light-hearted example of the genre as a whole, pushing against the prescribed requirements of what romance fiction must be. Though Stevenson has never before been studied through an academic lens, her novels were popular and successful, which suggests that this kind of fiction met the needs of readers during the early to mid-20th century, while coping with the devastation and uncertainty of war.

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Preface

Though I have dedicated my life to studying fiction, I was rarely tempted away from the great works that had seemingly always been taught in universities and colleges because I believed that Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, Joyce, and Woolf (among others) were the only “important” authors to study. Recently, though, I began to find myself lingering in the bookstore aisles a bit longer than usual, not merely jumping for the nearest copy of a classic, but picking up books by authors I had never read before.

On one of these outings, I was fortunate enough to stumble upon two novels by D.E. Stevenson. Not only had I never read her work, I had also never heard her name in any literary context. That moment, in that bookstore, prompted this thesis, as I became intrigued by the ways in which authors who have been virtually “forgotten,” like Stevenson, affected audiences in specific eras. In what follows, I will examine Stevenson’s life and her works, discuss the genre of Romance Fiction and its role during the World Wars, and analyze Anglo-German relations within both Stevenson’s novels and others during that same era. By doing so, I believe that a more complete picture of the attitudes of British women on the homefront toward war – not just the one created in the study of more canonical authors of the era – will become apparent.

Stevenson’s life was an interesting one and her family’s importance to Scottish nationalism can be seen in both the lighthouses that still stand on the country’s coastlines and in the literary heritage that she and her cousin Robert Louis Stevenson left behind. Though she never reached the level of fame that her cousin achieved, she was an influential writer within the romance fiction genre. She was not well-received in

academic or scholarly arenas, but she was able to forge a writing career through the commercial success of her novels.

Stevenson's family was certainly of the upper class, affording her the opportunity to travel the continent quite extensively as a young girl. She was, like many of her female contemporaries in this social stratum, never formally educated, though she was tutored by nannies. Her parents did not approve of her writing, but she did so anyway, and published over forty novels over the course of her life. Though categorized as a romance fiction novelist, she occasionally explored writing techniques and themes that are not typical of the genre as a whole.

The World Wars had a particularly poignant influence on Stevenson and she addressed them in her novels in various ways. At the time novels like *Mrs. Tim of the Regiment* and *The English Air* were published, the Modernist movement had fully taken shape and dominated academic readership. Romance fiction was (and still is) considered a genre of light-hearted "fluff," not deserving of critical attention. Despite this, the ways in which women novelists of the genre approached the wars are important in their own right, as they reflect alternative understandings of and coping mechanisms for conflict. Additionally, as evidenced by the staggering popularity of romance novels, the genre operates as a way of tapping into and validating the emotions and desires of women – the overwhelming majority of the romance fiction audience. In terms of their importance during the wars, romance novels reflected how women on the homefront internalized and survived the uncertainty of their lives while their husbands, brothers, and friends were distant and in peril. In the case of *The English Air*, Stevenson's attention to Anglo-

German relations is indicative of the need to find and hold a common enemy, while she simultaneously declares patriotic sentiments for her English home.

It is my hope that this study will continue a discussion about the dynamic and important nature of romance fiction novels as they relate to the ways women approach the world around them, particularly in times of conflict. Stevenson is an excellent example of a writer who acknowledged the criticism of her genre, but strove to create books that were relatable and gave comfort to her audience. Her resurgent popularity is indicative of the fact that her writing can and does transcend both geographical and temporal boundaries.

I. From Lighthouses to Literature: The Life of D.E. Stevenson

In 1811, construction of the Bell Rock Lighthouse, situated on the North Sea near Dundee in Scotland, was completed. The structure, which remains the oldest standing rock lighthouse in the British Isles, was designed by Robert Stevenson (1772 – 1850), a pioneering engineer in the field (Bell Rock). In *An Account of the Bell Rock Light-house*, Stevenson explains the necessity for the construction of the building, particularly in light of the increasing need for safe routes to and from Scotland for trade and transportation. In annual visits occurring over twelve years, Stevenson detailed several shipwrecks, resulting in loss of life and goods (18). It was clear that the ships sailing the treacherous waters around Scotland were in need of the newly-designed Scottish lighthouses and, after its completion, Stevenson would spend the next thirty-two years designing and building twenty-two more lighthouses on Scotland's coasts. Additionally, he was responsible for the invention of the intermittent lights used within the structures and would pass his engineering legacy down to subsequent generations, the first of which included three of his sons, Alan (1807 – 1865), David (1815 – 1886), and Thomas (1818 – 1887), who would construct at least another fifty lighthouses collectively (McLynn 8).

But another talent was also developing within the Stevenson family: literary acuity. As evidenced by Robert Stevenson's highly romantic *Account*, which included more than just delineations of facts of the lighthouse's construction, writing was a seemingly natural talent for him. After his death in 1850, David Stevenson wrote his father's biography, entitled, *Life of Robert Stevenson, Civil Engineer*. In the preface, David acknowledges that his brother had also written a short biography of their father, though it had only been published for private use (v). Thus, at least two of Robert's sons

were, in their way, carrying on this literary endeavor. It was with the next two generations of Stevenson children, though, that the family's long-lasting foothold in the world of literature would begin to take shape. One of the Stevensons, Robert Louis, has endured as a true Scottish treasure, while the other, Dorothy Emily, though widely ignored by the academic world, developed and maintained wide popularity and readership, culminating in a renewed interest in her works, particularly over the last several years. Though the latter is the focus of this study, it is prudent to first look to her cousin to create a more concrete picture of the common literary genius within the family.

In November 1850, four months after Robert Stevenson died, Margaret Balfour Stevenson, Thomas's wife, gave birth to their only son, Robert Louis Stevenson (RLS) (McLynn 8, 10). Though a sick child, his father fully expected him to continue in the family business and become a lighthouse engineer. In fact, RLS spent many summers touring Scotland's (and his family's) famed lighthouses, learning the engineering trade (34). By 1871, he had learned enough of the trade to earn a silver medal from the Royal Scottish Society for his delivery of a paper regarding new lighthouse technologies (36). Soon after, and much to his father's chagrin, RLS declared that he had no intention of following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps (37). His father acquiesced, enrolling him in Edinburgh University to study law, though RLS was more or less going through the motions with no intention of ever actually practicing the profession. Still, RLS passed the Scottish Bar in 1872, though all he aspired to be was a writer (58).

Over the course of his short life, RLS penned such classics as *Treasure Island*, in 1883, and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in 1886. Though he only lived to be forty-four years old, his influence on literature has endured ("Brief"). According to

Penny Fielding, “Robert Louis Stevenson remains one of the most famous, yet, paradoxically, one of the least well-known writers of the second half of the nineteenth century” (1). She argues that because of the many “retellings and in theatre and film adaptations,” RLS is separated from his work, becoming a figurehead, rather than author (1). Additionally, after the rise of Modernism in the early twentieth century, Frank Swinnerton said of RLS’s fiction, “It is no longer possible for a serious critic to place him among the great writers, because in no department of letters – except the boy’s book and the short-story – has he written work of first-class importance” (qtd. in Duncan 12). Despite the loss of favor during a Modernist age, and even though often not necessarily considered an “iconic Scottish writer” in the same way Robert Burns and Walter Scott are, RLS no doubt secured his place among great Scottish authors who made their mark not only on the people of their native country, but also on the literary world (7). The Stevenson family’s literary tradition did not end with Robert Louis Stevenson, though.

Thomas Stevenson’s brother, David, had two sons, David Alan Stevenson (1854 – 1938) and Charles Stevenson (1855 – 1950), both of whom joined the family business and became, unlike their famous cousin, lighthouse engineers (“David Alan” and “Charles Alexander”). From the time they took over the company to David Alan Stevenson’s death in 1938, the two were involved in the construction of over thirty-five lighthouses in Scotland, England, and the Isle of Man (“D & C Stevenson”). Charles’s son, D. Alan Stevenson, was born in 1891 and was the last recorded family member to work in the capacity of lighthouse engineer (“Charles Alexander”).

On January 20, 1892, David Alan Stevenson married Annie Roberts at Beckenham, Kent, after she had served as a bridesmaid at Charles Stevenson’s wedding

(Hogg 1). The couple had two children, Dorothy Emily (later to be known as D.E.) and Kathleen (1). Dorothy Emily was born on November 18, 1892, in Edinburgh, Scotland, and, though they were born into a family of well-educated engineers, formal education was not offered them, as their parents believed it to be inappropriate for young ladies (Hayne 641). Instead, the girls were taught by private governesses in Scotland, England, and France, depending on where they happened to be traveling (641). In many respects, this was perhaps the best situation for the young Stevensons, as compulsory education for children in Scotland – or, more specifically, for girls – was centered on traditional female roles in certain kinds of industry or within the home (Lynch 648). The Universities (Scotland) Act of 1889 made it possible for women to attend college on equal ground with their male counterparts, but these women were often not given either the same respect at the universities or adequate jobs post-graduation, despite the supposed equality (649). Regardless, Dorothy was not among the women who attended college, either equally or otherwise, even though her male predecessors had been decided Edinburgh University men. Despite a lack of formal education, she was offered a world of knowledge via her experiences traveling Scotland and Europe with her family.

Beginning very early in her life, Dorothy traveled every August with her family to North Berwick for holiday. During the month they would spend away from Edinburgh each year, she watched her father and uncle play golf, a sport to which she took a great liking. In fact, by the age of four, she had already learned the intricacies of the game, which would later put her in a position to be considered for the Scottish Ladies' Team (Hogg 1). But the family's traveling was not always for the purpose of sport. Dorothy's father was frequently ill, resulting in the family taking many trips south to Switzerland,

France, and Italy. Though they always returned to Edinburgh, it was in these foreign lands where Dorothy discovered a passion for adventure, which perhaps inspired her to begin writing, an occupation which her father, like her great-uncle, Thomas, discouraged. In fact, she often hid in a closet to write, as young as the age of eight, in order to prevent her parents from knowing what she was doing (Hagan).

In 1915, at the age of twenty-two, D.E. Stevenson published her first book of poetry, *Meadow-Flowers*, with the Macdonald Publishing Firm in London. She would later publish three other compilations of verse, *The Starry Mantle: Poems* (London: Stockwell, 1926), *Alister and Co.: Poems* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940), and *It's Nice to Be Me* (London: Methuen, 1943), but her true calling was to be found in her many works of fiction, which were written and published nearly continuously for much of her adult life (Hayne 642).

On January 20, 1916, Dorothy married Major James Reid Peploe, who had served with the 6th Ghurka Rifles, a regiment that participated in the Gallipoli Campaign in Turkey during World War I (Hogg 1, Pettigrew). Though the two had never met before the war, Dorothy had known his family for some time. When Major Peploe returned from battle, wounded, the couple finally met and, after his recovery, was united at St. John's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh (Hogg 1). In December of that same year, their first child, Annie Patricia Reid Peploe was born, followed by James Robert Stevenson Peploe ("Robin") in 1918, and Rosemary Fleming Peploe in 1922 (2). Despite being a mother of three young children, D.E. Stevenson published her first novel, *Peter West*, with Chambers Publishing, London, in 1923 (Hayne 641). It also appeared in serial form in *The Chamber Journal* that same year (Hogg 6). Her next novel would not be

published for another nine years, a delay that might be partially attributed to Annie's death from complications with measles in 1928 and the birth, in 1930, of the Peploes' final child, John William (Hogg 2).

Stevenson initially published *Mrs. Tim of the Regiment* in 1932, with Cape Publishing, London, after being persuaded by a family friend to send her diary for publication. The contents related her experiences as an army wife during World War I and the book was so well received that she was prompted to publish three more in the Mrs. Tim series. In 1973, when the four installments were republished, she wrote a foreword for the novels, to be included on those and subsequent editions ("A Note"). Stevenson writes:

The first "Mrs. Tim" was written many years ago. It was written at the request of a professor of English history in a well-known university who was a personal friend. Their daughter was engaged to be married to an officer in a Highland Regiment. Naturally enough they wanted to know what it would be like and what she would be expected to do...[After I wrote the second,] the two books were accepted by a publisher and published in an omnibus volume. It was surprisingly successful. It was well reviewed and the sales were eminently satisfactory; the fan-mail was astonishing. ("Author's Foreword" vii)

The reviews were, indeed, positive. The *New York Times*, on January 14, 1940, declared that the "book...may appeal even more strongly to American readers than to its original public" and that "Miss Stevenson never seems to work at being funny, but she has spiced this tale of British army with an unobtrusive, effortless wit which often proves deceptively sharp" ("Army Life"). Similarly, Ruth Page, from the *Boston Transcript*,

lauded the novel in February 1940, saying, “For the purposes of Miss Stevenson's talent and of Mrs. Tim's wit, the form is perfect” (qtd. in Hagan).

In 1934, Stevenson published *Miss Bunclie's Book* (London: Jenkins, 1934 and New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), which, though popular, did not receive the praise of the previous novel. Charlotte Dean, from her August 1937 review in the *New York Times*, wrote that the book was “a gentle, simple, mildly satirical tale,” without the literary wit Stevenson had employed in *Mrs. Tim* (qtd. in Hagan). Despite the more tepid reception of critics, *Miss Bunclie* and its two sequels, *Miss Bunclie, Married* (London: Jenkins, 1936 and New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937) and *The Two Mrs. Abbotts* (London: Collins, 1943 and New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1943) were immensely popular and remain so today, particularly after their recent republications (Hayne 641).

Stevenson also enjoyed film, joining the Bearsden Film Club and writing a short piece for production with that group. In 1933, *Fickle Fortune* was submitted as an entry to the Scottish Amateur Film Festival. The fifteen-minute silent film featured both Stevenson and her daughter, Rosemary, in leading roles (Hogg 8). Additionally, Stevenson was often asked to speak to local societies about her writing, as well as about her second cousin Robert Louis Stevenson, both of which she did enthusiastically (Hogg 2).

From 1934 to 1936, Stevenson wrote and published five more novels, including *The Empty World: A Romance of the Future* (London: Jenkins, 1936; republished as *A World in Spell*, New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939), which was Stevenson's only attempt at departing from her traditional genre of romance fiction for science fiction. The reviews were less than kind, including one from *Times Literary Supplement* in 1936,

which read, “Despite [the novel’s] framework, [it] appeals more to connoisseurs of love stories than to those of scientific romances” (qtd. in Hagan).

Stevenson’s string of publications continued and, from 1937 to 1939, three more novels were printed, followed in 1940 by *The English Air* (London: Collins and New York: Farrar and Rinehart), despite Stevenson’s request to delay its release due to Britain’s political and social climates during World War II. Collins published the book, regardless, and, though Stevenson’s reservations were valid and an explanatory foreword she had written was not included, *The English Air* became one of her devoted readers’ favorites. According to Joanne Harack Hayne, the novel is “utterly engrossing” and the “interconnection of character and setting” proved successful (643).

In 1940, the Stevensons moved from Bearsden to Moffat, Scotland, after bombs fell on the Glasgow docks. Though Major Peploe was ill at the time of their move and they considered it a temporary living situation, the family remained in Moffat permanently (Hogg 2). From 1940 to 1941, with World War II still raging, Stevenson published three more novels, including the second installment in the widely popular *Mrs. Tim* series. Stevenson acknowledges the effects the war had on her during the writing of the novel:

Mrs. Tim Carries On was easily written, for it is just a day-to-day account of what happened and what we did – and said and felt. The book was a comfort to me in those dark days; it helped me to carry on, and a sort of pattern emerged from the chaos.

Like its predecessor, the book was written from my own personal diary but this time there was no need to expand the story nor to ‘pep it up’ for there was enough pep already in my diary for half a dozen books. (“Author’s”)

Indeed, Stevenson had two more novels published in the series: *Mrs. Tim Gets a Job* (London: Collins, 1947 and New York: Rinehart, 1947) and *Mrs. Tim Flies Home* (London: Collins, 1952 and New York: Rinehart, 1952). While there was generally a delay between the British and American publications of her novels, the *Mrs. Tim* books were popular enough to warrant immediate attention in both markets (Hayne 642). Stevenson, it seems, had a talent for writing appealing wartime novels that spoke to her audiences when they needed them most, which I will discuss at length in the next two chapters of this study.

By 1946, with World War II over, Stevenson settled into what would become a new career trend, which, with the exception of the two novels published in 1947, was to write and publish one book a year until her retirement in 1970 (Hayne 642). By this point in her career, critics began to note that the charming and witty nature of her previous novels was waning (Hagan). When *Amberwell* (London: Collins, 1955 and New York: Rinehart, 1955) was published, the review in the *New York Times* was lukewarm, calling the novel “Not one of Miss Stevenson’s best” (“A Stately Dwelling”). Further, as the world was on the verge of a sexual revolution, Stevenson’s novels remained “lady-like,” prompting her to be viewed as a “novelist of nostalgia” (Hagan). Still, she wrote on, publishing another fifteen books before her death.

It seems that the diminution of Stevenson’s general popularity can be attributed to the same reason why so many people still remain devoted to her. According to Millicent

Taylor in a review of *The Musgraves* in *The Christian Science Monitor*, “This writer of more than 30 popular novels of English country life...is an experienced craftsman, who has provided us over the years with a host of fictional characters so real as to seem our friends.” While some critics denounced the familiarity of the characters and plots in Stevenson’s novels, others found comfort in them, resulting in their lasting love for the author and her books.

On April 12, 1969, Major Peploe died at the age of eighty-two; the couple had been married for fifty-three years (Hogg 2). A little over three years later, D.E. Stevenson, after suffering for many years with crippling osteoarthritis, finally succumbed to illness on December 30, 1973, at the Royal Infirmary, Dumfries. The official causes of death were “Bronchopneumonia, perforation of small intestine, and Diverticulitis” and she was buried next to Major Peploe in Moffat (Hogg 2). She was eighty-one years old.

D.E. Stevenson was widely read between 1923 and 1970, despite the near-decade gap between the publication of her first and second novels. In all, she published forty-five novels and four books of verse over her fifty-five year career, made even more remarkable by that nine-year span of non-publication. In addition, there were many years in which Stevenson published multiple novels, including 1936, which saw three new books in print. According to Sourcebooks Publishing, in a note in the 2013 republication of *The Young Clementina*, a total of seven million copies of her novels were sold during her life in both Great Britain and the United States (“About”). Though present total worldwide sales are currently unavailable, with the recent releases of several of her novels, including *Mrs. Tim of the Regiment* (New York: Bloomsbury Group, 2009), *Miss Buncler’s Book* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2012), *Miss Buncler Married* (Illinois:

Sourcebooks, 2012), *The Young Clementina* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2013), *The Two Mrs. Abbotts* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2014), and the upcoming release of *The Four Graces* (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2014), it is clear that there is not only a renewed interest in her novels, but also a continued admiration for her writing. In addition to the hard copy releases of the Sourcebook editions, Stevenson's novels are now available via electronic format, opening up a new avenue for readers to discover her writing (Amazon). Greyladies has also republished both previously-released and previously-unknown Stevenson works, including *Emily Dennistoun*, *The Fair Miss Fortune*, *Portrait of Saskia*, *Jean Erskine's Secret*, *Found in the Attic*, and *Peter West*, though distribution is small and direct from the Edinburgh publishing house.

In addition, Stevenson's devoted fans host group sites on both Yahoo and Facebook, encouraging new and old readers alike to join in book discussions, share their personal Stevenson-related novel moments, and engage in critical analyses of her books. I was fortunate enough to establish a host of wonderful connections with these devotees and they have provided a wealth of knowledge that could not be found elsewhere.

II. Romance Fiction and the Great Wars

D.E. Stevenson's novels are broadly categorized as "romance fiction." Individually, these types of books are rarely studied from an academic perspective, though the genre itself proves interesting, if for no other reason than its continuous dominance of literary markets. But even without the staggering annual sales of romance fiction, the genre is wide-ranging, encompassing subgenres such as historical romance, erotic romance, series romance, and gothic romance (Mussell vi). This diversity causes the genre to be somewhat undefinable, as each of the subgenres can exist almost entirely separate from the others. Regardless, the books clearly fill some sort of need for average readers, mostly women, and, because of this, romance fiction has begun to spark the interest of scholars, particularly from the perspectives of women's and cultural studies (vii). With respect to Stevenson's oeuvre, the romance fiction written and published during the World Wars served its own distinct purposes, though in sometimes unpredictable ways, resulting in wide readership and devoted followers. In this chapter, I investigate the definitions, literary implications, and limitations of romance fiction as they relate to Stevenson's novels, while also analyzing her place within the era of wartime romance fiction writing in order to better understand her position among other authors of that time.

When I started this study, several of my colleagues responded in perplexed ways to my explanation of an investigation into romance fiction and very few were resoundingly positive. With confused (and sometimes rather disgusted) expressions, I received questions such as, "Romance as in Harlequin books?" and "Serious romance or dime-store novels?" These reactions offered me a rather interesting challenge: What did

“romance fiction,” as an indicator of content or genre, actually mean? Certainly, the genre encompasses works as diverse as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and Danielle Steele’s *Daddy*. This being the case, it seems unlikely that a concrete definition of the genre might exist. Pamela Regis, in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, writes:

A romance novel – a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines – requires certain narrative events. They are essential, for without them the work is not a romance novel...Eight narrative events take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free. In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. (27)

In the case of D.E. Stevenson’s most popular novels, this formula might seem a bit of a stretch, as the “path to marriage,” so to speak, is not necessarily among the important themes. In one of her most successful works, *Miss Buncler’s Book*, the centerpiece of the story is what the title implies: the writing and reception of the fictional novel *Disturber of the Peace*. Barbara Buncler, an aspiring author, writes her book based on what she knows – the people living in her small English village. The novel is immediately successful, but her neighbors are less than enthusiastic when they begin to realize that they are its subject, causing great turmoil in the town. Though Barbara and her publisher, Mr. Abbott, do eventually marry, the heroine’s journey arriving at this conclusion is

focused very little on their courtship and betrothal. In fact, three of Regis's specific narrative events from the list – “the barrier,” “ritual death,” and “recognition” – seem to apply very little to *Miss Buncle*, at least according to the explanations Regis assigns them.

“The barrier,” or “A series of scenes often scattered throughout the novel [that] establishes for the reader the reasons that this heroine and hero cannot marry,” is certainly evident in well-known romance novels (32). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy and Elizabeth are initially separated by class and temperament; in *Jane Eyre*, Jane and Mr. Rochester cannot marry because he is already married. These barriers, according to Regis, are critical for the forward motion of the plot of these novels (32). Without barriers, the romantic quest of the heroine is “easy” or “conflict-free,” which potentially diminishes the importance or immediacy of the story as a whole, at least from the perspective of the genre's assumed purpose. In *Miss Buncle*, Barbara and Mr. Abbott face no such obstacles to their relationship. In fact, the barriers that exist within the novel are between Barbara and her Silverstream neighbors and have nothing to do with her forthcoming marriage.

Similarly, the “point of ritual death” is entirely absent in *Miss Buncle*. This element refers to “the moment in the narrative when the union between heroine and hero, the hoped for resolution, seems absolutely impossible” (Regis 35). At no point does the relationship between Barbara and Mr. Abbott appear in danger, unless one were to assume that the increasingly agitated Silverstream population might do the heroine some sort of harm. Incensed by her harsh (but honest) portrayals of them in *Disturber of the Peace*, not one of them would engage in any sort of violent retaliation, though many would either seek to make her continued residence in the small village both difficult and

solitary or engage in some level of legal action against her. Again, the progression of this story line is independent of the one focused on Barbara's relationship with her publisher, who, of course, believes her book to be genuine and entertaining (an opinion bolstered by its popularity).

Finally, the "recognition," or "new information that will overcome the barrier," can only be applied to *Miss Buncle* if the assumption of Barbara's social demise at the hands of her neighbors is valid (Regis 36). If readers believe that she will be subjected to ridicule or lawsuits, causing a rift between her and Mr. Abbott, then the couple's exodus from Silverstream might, therefore, be the needed recognition to bring them together. But the text itself makes no such claims about the necessity of their move and seems to exist simply for the purpose of Barbara's own continued happiness and need to get away from the angry villagers. Rather than categorizing this as "recognition," it *might* be more accurate to say that it is, on some level, Mr. Abbott's rescue of Barbara from her community. According to Diana Reep, in *The Rescue and Romance*, "The rescue [is] a structured convention which controls the movement of the romantic plot" (1). Thus, it could potentially be argued that Mr. Abbott's so-called "sweeping away" of Barbara from Silverstream enables her to begin a peaceful life with him somewhere else. In this case, "the rescue at the end of the novel saves the heroine from her trouble, ends the novel by resolving the problem, and secures the marriage of the couple" (69). Mr. Abbott, in publishing the novel and giving Barbara an "out" via their engagement, has allowed the heroine to escape the increasingly vilifying nature of her neighbor's criticism, both by giving her financial freedom and the opportunity to leave Silverstream.

While this seems an appropriate explanation of the conclusion of *Miss Buncl* on the surface, Stevenson's portrayal of the events leading up to the marriage suggest something completely different. Whereas the novel ends with a happy union and Barbara's move from Silverstream, it is not Mr. Abbott who arrives as the knight-in-shining-armor to persuade her away. After the townspeople began to realize that she was, indeed, the infamous John Smith, author of the novel that had turned the little village upside down, Barbara contemplates her existence there. Stevenson writes:

She had lived in Silverstream all her life but the last few months had been too great a strain upon her nerves, she was not happy in Silverstream... Barbara felt that it would be a great relief to get away from Silverstream and leave all her fears, and all her troubles, behind. ("Miss Buncl" 284)

Thus, it is not that Barbara is a heroine in need of a hero to save her; in fact, it is she who has come to her own rescue. By writing *Disturber of the Peace*, she secures for herself a professional future and the monetary resources to embark on a life of her own creation. Mr. Abbott's companionship is merely a component of this new adventure, made possible by her intelligence and talent, not his.

If a work like *Miss Buncl* strays from the prescribed conventions that are seemingly fundamental to the romance fiction genre, is it still a romance novel? According to Janice Radway, in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, the discrepancies among singular instances of romance fiction matter little to critics and scholars. She writes:

[The] critic typically selects a particular popular genre for analysis in the hope of generating some conclusions about the ideological function of the genre upon the

people who read it. Most critics assume initially that because these popular genres appear to be formulaic, all differences and variations exhibited by particular examples of them are insignificant. As a result, it becomes possible to analyze a few randomly selected texts because they can be taken as representatives of the generic type. (6)

The genre, then, has fluid parameters, with the only concrete requirement being that its novels have happy endings facilitated by some union between two people (Regis 9). Thus, any critic who attempts to make sweeping assumptions about the genre's formula-driven content does so rather haphazardly. If we consider, briefly, that novels like Forster's *A Room with a View* and all Harlequin paperbacks are collectively grouped under the romance fiction umbrella, it seems impossible to definitively understand what the genre is or means. But, then, one might ask, "Does it *matter* to which genre a book is assigned?"

According to Kay Mussell, in her Preface to the reference book *Twentieth Century Romance and Gothic Writers*, genre affiliation matters greatly, particularly with regard to works that are considered "romance fiction." She writes:

For the most part...writers of gothic and romantic novels have worked in relative obscurity, attracting a largely female audience of readers who were in on the secret. Both gothics and romances have been categorized by critics and scholars as "mere" love stories or as unrealistic emotional adventures unworthy of serious consideration. (v)

In other words, this categorization almost immediately closes the door for authors' works to be taken seriously, insofar as the academic world is concerned. Regis adds:

Some...critics make statements about “the romance” in such a way that the entire genre is characterized – negatively – by its association with a few texts that a critic mistakes as representative. Their conception of the range of the romance novel, of the true boundaries of the genre, is inadequate in that they mistake a part – a few texts – for the whole – for the entire genre. (xii)

With the exception of novelists such as Austen, the Brontës, Forster, and few others, who managed to secure their places among canonical authors, the designation of “romance” rarely leads a writer into the path of academic discourse or scholarship. Mussell continues:

Over the past two centuries, [gothic and romance] formulas have experienced intermittent waves of prominence that eventually waned, although their production has never entirely disappeared. The novels of especially popular authors remain in print for generations of readers while the more ephemeral works are forgotten. (vii)

But Stevenson falls somewhere outside these two possibilities. Though popular, many of her novels remain out of print, and, yet, there is increasing demand for their republication, as discussed in Chapter One. Deborah Philips, in *Women’s Fiction 1945 – 2005: Writing Romances* argues:

Because this is fiction that is generally not taken seriously by critics, these novels can express commonly experienced doubts and anxieties that cannot be admitted in any other context. And what they share is an articulation of anxieties about what it means to be a woman, the desires of the feminine, that are inadmissible elsewhere. (5)

It would seem, then, that it is more important that romance novels serve a specific purpose for readers, most of whom are women, rather than to adhere strictly to a set group of formulaic standards. This purpose – the acknowledgement and exploration of the feminine – has proven to be the ultimate success of the genre as a whole and Stevenson’s novels are no exception.

Popularity, though, is rarely an indicator of academic attention. According the Romance Writers of America, the genre of romance fiction is now continuously at the top of the book market game in the United States. In 2012, sales of romance novels were responsible for 16.7% of the national book market, raking in a stupefying \$1.438 billion. This figure is made even more impressive when compared to the annual sales of literary classics, which only totaled around \$470.5 million (RWA). How then, does the academic world ignore such staggering statistics? According to Richard Ohmann, sales and readership are relatively inconsequential when novels are distinguished to be worthy of study and scholarship (205). He cites the novel *Love Story* by Erich Segal as proof of this, explaining that, despite the fact it sold over 20 million copies after being published in 1970, it was forgotten relatively soon after publication (205). As has been previously discussed, Stevenson’s popularity among readers is certainly not in question; however, a simple *MLA* search reveals that, despite the positive book reviews of Stevenson’s novels, only one reference to Stevenson – a dictionary entry in *British Novelists Between the Wars* – is found. This, of course, presents a great challenge to anyone desiring to study her from an academic perspective, as what little is available about her life and career must be pieced together in patchwork fashion in order to create a vision of what she and her novels mean in the context of literature and literary studies.

The very title of the above reference, *British Novelists Between the Wars*, might serve to further illuminate *why* Stevenson's novels were widely dismissed or forgotten, perhaps even more so than the mere designation of her fiction as part of the romance genre. The wars, both World War I and World War II, were game-changers for every aspect of British society and culture; literature itself was not untouched. The most enduring examples of the literature of the era – Modernist works – were pieces of literature that focused on the desecration of both Britain and the human condition as a result of war. In many ways, the beauty of love, or the promise of happy endings, had been lost along with the millions of British subjects who died during the conflicts; this changed consciousness was reflected in the experimental Modernist literature of authors like Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot (Pearce 133).

The genre of romance fiction – that is, the genre from a general perspective – was also altered. During the wars, many romance readers began flocking to novels that included some kind of “twist” or underlying strangeness, presumably as a way to identify with the undeniable uncertainty of “real-life love” (132). To be sure, many women were forced to recognize the very dangerous nature of war and the possibility that their beloved husbands or suitors would not be returning home. Some authors responded by turning their attention to more gothic strains of romance fiction, but others, like Stevenson, used the wars as springboards for plot and character development.

Stevenson experiments with structure in the *Mrs. Tim* series, which was written in epistolary form, unlike any of her previous novels. But unlike the authors of the age who were focused on the horrors of war and their undeniable effects on the human psyche, Stevenson remained committed to a lighter portrayal of people attempting to persevere

during times of conflict. In the foreword she wrote for the 1974 rerelease of the *Mrs. Tim* series, Stevenson addressed this decision directly:

To me this book brings back the past so vividly that even now – thirty years later – I cannot read it without laughter and tears. Laughter? Yes, for in spite of the sadness and badness of Total War, the miseries we suffered, and the awful anxieties we endured, cheerfulness broke through at unexpected moments – and we laughed. (“Author’s”)

But despite the continuation of matrimonial endings and seemingly light subject matter, Stevenson, and, by extension, her wartime prose, was not immune to the destruction and chaos caused by the conflicts. To be sure, there lingers a perpetual uneasiness among her heroines, which creates an almost solemn space, despite whatever happiness is achieved by them.

In *Mrs. Tim of the Regiment*, for example, Hester is constantly reminded of the fact that Tim is away training his regiment. She is left alone with their two children in a new home in Scotland (they have just moved from England to accommodate easier access to Tim’s recent post) and she never ceases to yearn for his presence. At times, Hester is also lost in deep contemplation about the state of the world that seems to go on around her – perhaps without her. In a moment of solitude, she thinks about the “Secret of the Universe” (188). Stevenson writes:

But where to look for the secret – where to find it? Those mountains, dreaming so peacefully in the sunshine – do they possess it? Could I wrest it from their eternal silence? Shall I find it in the swallow’s jagged flight, as it darts across the garden in pursuit of flies? Shall I find it in the call of the cuckoo, echoing sadly

from the pine-clad hills? Or is it hidden deep in the hearts of human beings – a piece here and a piece there – so that if you could find all the pieces and fit them together, the puzzle would be complete? But the hearts of human beings are so difficult to find – people are so sealed up in themselves, withdrawn behind impenetrable barriers. (189)

These musings are hardly those of a woman who is unaware of the realities of the raging war on her doorstep. Though the novel ends with Tim’s impending return, Hester acknowledges that she will never be the same person she was before he left. She has experienced what she calls a “change of soul,” and even when she welcomes him back with open arms, life is different, less carefree or innocent than it had been (330).

Similarly, in *The Two Mrs. Abbotts*, the third installment of the *Miss Bunclie* series published in 1943, life for Barbara has changed dramatically. Though the story still contains the charm and humor of the first two novels, we now find our heroine, a mother of two, wrestling to maintain some semblance of normalcy for her children amidst World War II. When Simon and Fay want to buy Dorcas, their nurse and long-time employee of the Bunclie family (she had nursed Barbara, as well), a birthday present, Barbara is forced to remind them that their ration coupons cannot be spared for the dressing gown and chocolates they had initially suggested (259). The family goes on an “expedition” around Wandlebury looking for a satisfactory gift, but Barbara and the children’s suggestions are continually rebuffed by shop owners. Stevenson writes:

“Oh no, we haven’t had any for months.” Sometimes the reply was polite and regretful; sometimes it was scornful and rude. Sometimes it was uttered in the tone of voice that really meant, “Don’t you realize that we’re at war?” Barbara

would have liked to explain that she knew about the war and that she was merely asking for cups and saucers and clocks and pens at the behest of her children, who could not be expected to know very much about the war owing to their tender age. The oddest thing was that the shops did not look empty. They looked quite well-stocked, but they were full of all the things one did not happen to want – just like *Alice through the Looking Glass*, thought Barbara. (259)

Finally, the children decide on an oak box for Dorcas and, even though the shopkeeper tells them that there is no paper or string available with which to wrap the present, they have succeeded in their mission. And life goes on.

But in addition to the depiction of Barbara's seemingly serene life on the homefront, *The Two Mrs. Abbotts* also offers a glimpse into the realities of battle and the effects the war was having on a younger generation. Jerry, Barbara's niece, is in love with Sam, a tank operator on the front lines in Egypt. Jerry writes letters to him but also thinks about her other companions who have been unlucky in war. Stevenson writes, "The others had all gone – all the good ones – Fred and Edgar and little Joe... and Sam, too. Edgar was dead. Fred was starving in a German prison, Sam was lost in the wilds of an African desert" (73). For Jerry, a young woman left behind by the men of her generation, the war seems close and threatening, more so to her than her aunt. Then, Stevenson offers readers a view into one of Sam's battles, which expresses how terrifying war must have been for these young men. She writes:

Almost before he knew it they had met the enemy and gone right through, keeping together in a compact mass as they had been trained to do... and now Sam rallied his force and turned sideways and raked the enemy with machine-gun

fire...and then with another wave of his arm he charged the enemy again. Smoke from the guns and sand from the churning tracks combined in a thick cloud and amongst this cloud the tanks wheeled and turned and maneuvered like prehistoric monsters...and fire belched from their guns in a constant shattering roar. (146)

Though the battle is won and Sam's company is relatively unscathed, there still lingers, nevertheless, an uneasy acceptance of the atrocities of war, as Sam congratulates himself for having "bagged three Germans" (146).

The ending of *The Two Mrs. Abbotts*, as a Stevenson reader would expect, is cheerful and full of promise. But there is more to the story's happy conclusion than just the betrothal of Archie and Jane. After leaving the dentist office where he has proposed to his love, Archie finds himself in the town square in front of the long dormant fountain constructed in the figure of a young boy with a water jar. By town ordinance, it has been decreed that water should not flow from the fountain because of the war and Archie, in his newfound happiness, decides to rectify the situation, giving new "life" to the stone boy. In a moment of lovestruck daring, Archie turns the fountain's water back on.

Stevenson writes:

The effect was magical. In a moment the fountain came to life and a stream of water sprang from the jar the boy held upon his shoulder; it towered into the air like a silver pillar and rained down in sparkling cascades. Standing back and surveying the result of his illegal action Archie felt like a king. The sun blazed down upon the falling water, creating a thousand rainbows and amongst the rainbows stood the boy, no longer dusty and parched and hopeless, but clean and joyous. (276)

This small act, in a poignant way, shows the necessity of hope during dark times.

Though the war continues, Archie's restoration of the fountain is representative of a return to life – an end to the dry doom that has pervaded his world for so long.

The English Air is considered by many of Stevenson's fans to be her most "serious" work, comprising her most critical perspectives on human psychology and the effects of war. The story concerns Franz von Heiden, a young German man who comes to live with English relatives in the last months of peace before World War II. Franz, who has Nazi ties, begins to fall in love with his English cousin, Wynne, and, as the war dawns, he is forced to decide between his German roots and his newfound respect for English life. Throughout the novel, Stevenson artfully weaves in depictions of how this life has been affected by the war. She writes:

The war had had very little effect upon the outward appearance of Chellford. It was in people's hearts that the change was wrought and English people do not wear their hearts on their sleeves... Sometimes it was difficult to believe that war had really come and it was all the more difficult because the weather was so beautiful; the sun shone golden in a cloudless sky, the sea was like blue glass. (How *could* one believe that death might rain from that sky at any moment of the day or night, or that death lurked beneath that lovely peaceful sea?) Slowly the trees turned red and brown, orange and golden; slowly the tired leaves fell. (219)

Stevenson chronicles many events of World War II, including Hitler's invasion of Poland and the shock and fear that rose throughout the English consciousness, the preparation of hospitals for wounded soldiers, and the sinking of battleships, among others.

Whereas *Miss Buncle* deviated from the romance genre formula, *The English Air* follows it almost exactly. “The barrier” is immediately obvious, as the main characters are of opposing nationalities (Regis 27). Wynne is English and Franz is German, a distinction that presents great difficulty at the onset of war between the two countries. Similarly, the “ritual death” occurs as World War II dawns, presenting the impossibility of a positive outcome of their shared affection (27). The “recognition” stage of the novel occurs once Franz has entirely shed his affiliation with his German heritage, resulting in both his transformation to an English man and his ability to act upon the love he feels for Wynne (27).

The novel ends with the reluctant engagement of Wynne and Franz (now Frank) – Frank is reluctant because he is about to go to battle in the Finnish War and is uncertain that he will return. In many ways, the story seems like blatant propaganda with the conversion of a Nazi won over by the morality and beauty of the English people. Regardless, *The English Air* is considered among Stevenson’s finest. According to Joanne Harack Hayne in *Twentieth-Century Romance and Gothic Writers*, *The English Air* is “skillfully plotted” and “[represents] the pure English modern romance at its very best” (643). For this reason, the next chapter of this study will deal specifically with *The English Air* and the ways in which Anglo-German relations are represented and confronted within the novel. By doing this, I hope to illuminate more extensively the temperament of the era and the literary importance of Stevenson’s work.

As stated earlier, the romance genre is one of incredible diversity, which often causes it to be misunderstood and disregarded by critics and literary scholars. In order to understand and appreciate the range of the fiction in the category, each novel or author

must be considered individually, as Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and D.E. Stevenson are wildly different. It strikes me as unfortunate that writers like Stevenson have fallen into that “relative obscurity,” when their novels have so much to offer and say about times and places long past (Mussel v). From light-hearted accounts of the foibles of life in a quaint English village to the destruction and fear caused by total war, Stevenson transcends the formulaic notions of what romance fiction can and should be. Thus, the umbrella-like categorization of her novels is misleading, testing the boundaries of how scholars approach genre fiction as a whole. Stevenson shows that generalizations do not always apply.

III. The English Rose and the German Eagle:

The Proliferation of Stereotypical National Identities in *The English Air*

Women novelists who wrote during the Great Wars were faced with specific challenges, including the seeming necessity of commenting on conflicts of which they, for the most part, had very little firsthand knowledge (Beuman 129). Though most never personally saw the destruction of the battlefields, they were incapable of escaping the anxieties and fear the wars produced. Thus, it became rare for any woman writing between or during the wars to ignore the conflicts completely and some, Stevenson included, faced the wars head-on, to the best of their abilities (129). Many women authors felt the need to write their way through the wars in order to “come to terms with the changing world around them” (Maslen 38). Though *The English Air* is ultimately a work of romance fiction, ending with the betrothal of the two main characters, Stevenson weaves many war-influenced subtexts throughout the novel. Franz and Wynne serve as typical representations of their respective countries, with, of course, the latter, an English girl showcased as living a better life and having a greater understanding of humanity and morality than does her German male counterpart. These generalized character types are depicted in myriad ways, including their physical statures, their individual personalities, and their attitudes toward imperialism and conflict. Stevenson’s attention to these details indicates her ability to exploit propagandized attitudes of the British people, in general, toward both German and British national identities, while avoiding outright xenophobia through the softening nature of the romance genre.

Those on the British homefront developed their discriminatory attitudes against the German people from more than just the history of (and the ongoing conflict between)

the two nations. According to Gill Plain, in *Women's Fiction of the Second World War*, the British government “[presented] the public with a clearly defined and evil other on to which the weight of contemporary anxieties could be projected” (7). By providing the British populace with an “ideological façade” of what the German people were and how they behaved, the government was able to inspire a renewed sense of nationalism – the promotion of a national identity that must be defended at all costs against the forces of (German) evil (7). Of course, many British people were also terrified of German imperial aggression and this fear manifested itself to varying degrees. Thus, as literature is often representative of the time in which it is produced, it comes as no surprise that some British authors writing between and during the wars would reflect this sense of national pride and trepidation.

Not all British female writers, though, expressed unwavering support for Britain. Virginia Woolf was particularly vocal about how the destruction of war was caused by all nations involved, not just Germany. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf writes, “Certainly it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. So ugly they looked – German, English, French – so stupid” (15). The inclusion of a character like Miss Kilman, a history teacher of German origin, in *Mrs. Dalloway* is unsurprising, as she represents a German people for whom Woolf felt much disdain. Indeed, Miss Kilman dislikes Clarissa, hating her for the relatively easy life the English woman has led. Woolf writes, “If only she could make her weep; could ruin her; humiliate her; bring her to her knees crying” (122). Likewise, Clarissa treats Miss Kilman as an outsider, distrusting her because she views the woman through a lens of classism. Further, Woolf makes it clear

that Miss Kilman had “settled” for her position with the Dalloways after leaving Miss Dolby’s school because of her German heritage: “They turned her out because she would not pretend that the Germans were all villains – when she had German friends, when the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany” (121). This continuing resistance towards the Germans was promoted by the British government and “its propaganda organs” (Levenback 3).

But for as much as Miss Kilman portrays and rejects negative stereotypes of the Germans, so, too, does *Mrs. Dalloway* offer an unpleasant portrait of British involvement in World War I. Septimus Smith, a shell-shocked veteran, is shown as a victim of his country’s participation in the war and its subsequent denial of the personal challenges he faced upon return. He is riddled with guilt and plagued by the memories of his time in combat, but his suicide elicits little more than contempt and dismissal from his fellow countrymen. Dr. Holmes calls him a coward and Clarissa’s party guests discuss his death in terms of legislative actions (146, 179). Only Clarissa, who feels some odd connection to this soldier she does not know, acknowledges him as a casualty of the world. Woolf writes, “She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away” (182). By presenting Clarissa as a woman disillusioned with herself and her fellow Englishmen, Woolf displays attitudes towards Britain that were not part of the propaganda machine.

While Woolf was constructing this dark view of post-traumatic stress syndrome after the war, Stevenson and other romance novelists *were* drawing from popular and government-driven representations of both British and German stereotypes. As discussed in the previous chapter, Stevenson was not immune to the pull of British nationalism, nor

was she unaware of the harshness of World War II as it raged around her. In fact, in the “Author’s Foreword” to the *Mrs. Tim* series, she writes:

It is true that German planes came down...and used machine guns to kill pedestrians on the roads. Sometimes they circled over the harvest fields and killed a few farm labourers and horses. Why they did so is a mystery. There could not have been any military objective in these manoeuvres....Perhaps the German airmen did it for fun? Perhaps it amused them to see old gentlemen rolling into ditches? (viii)

Stevenson’s recollection of these events is punctuated by the need to assume that there is something base or vile about the Germans themselves, as they, according to her concluding questions, seemed to kill for sport, whereas the English were, according to Stevenson, merely fighting to survive.

Regardless, Stevenson was intensely aware of the need to maintain a semblance of hope during the wars. In fact, before *The English Air* was published in 1940, Stevenson wrote a foreword for the novel explaining why hope must be preserved. Though the foreword was never included, it stands as further testament to her understanding and recognition of the depravity and destruction caused by the world conflicts swirling around her. Stevenson writes:

So much has happened...innocent people have been killed, peaceful lands destroyed, and age-old dynasties have fallen in ruins....“The English Air” has become a period piece...this was how we thought and spoke and acted in those blessed days of peace...Someday the clouds will pass and we shall be happy

again. We must believe this or perish, for we cannot live without hope. (“English Foreword”)

Stevenson was afraid that the novel would be viewed by readers and critics as far too light-hearted for the audiences of the era, but her publisher assured her that “only the worst type of patriotic reader would consider the book too flippant for these times” (Collins). To be sure, the “patriotic reader” would find much to appreciate in the ways Stevenson portrays the characters of the novel (Collins).

Wynne Braithwaite is introduced as the vision of English vitality. She has “eyes...the shade of periwinkle blue and, as if that were not enough, she possessed golden curls, and a complexion of milk and roses which was slightly tanned by the sun” (“English” 9). Not only is she young and beautiful, untouched by the atrocities perpetrated by war or poverty, she is also vibrant and full of hope for the continuation of the peaceful existence she has heretofore always known. She lives with her mother, Sophie, and her uncle, Major Worthington, who moved in with the family after Mr. Braithwaite passed away several years prior from a relatively short illness. The family is of the upper class and exists in a world of leisure. Athletic and popular, Wynne fills her days at Fernacres, the family home, with tennis matches, dances, and outings with friends. At times naïve, she believes all people – British, German, or otherwise – are inherently good at heart. When Sophie reminds Wynne that her cousin Franz is coming from Germany to stay with them, Wynne is irritated by her mother’s continual insistence that they “must be very nice to him” (9). To the teenage girl, any other behavior is unfathomable and she cannot understand why there would be any reason to treat a German cousin differently than anyone else who might visit their home. When Mrs.

Braithwaite tells Wynne that Franz “can’t help” being German, Wynne says, “We mustn’t be so awfully insular... We mustn’t think that just because we like being British, everyone else would like to be British, too. I expect he’s very glad he’s a German and thinks it’s the best thing to be” (9). For Wynne, at least in the very early stages of the novel, the automatic elevation of oneself over another based on national identity is incomprehensible. Rather than approaching her cousin’s impending arrival with suspicion or doubt, she anticipates his presence as a positive enhancement of her day-to-day life.

Her mother, on the other hand, harbors great resentment for Franz’s father and is more worried about what to expect when he arrives. She explains that when her cousin and best friend, Elsie, had married Otto von Heiden, the nature of Sophie and Elsie’s relationship had taken a drastic turn, resulting in Elsie’s alienation. The couple moved to Germany, which to Sophie seemed like a gaping black hole that sucked the life from her cousin. The two friends communicated very little before the First War and not at all while it was being fought. Wynne, with her inability to understand how friends could be lost in such a way, questions the cessation of her mother’s relationship with Elsie. Sophie tells her daughter that war does horrible things to people, saying, “When we heard that the Germans were starving I couldn’t feel glad about it, because of course it meant that Elsie was starving too” (13). This admission startles Wynne, for she cannot fathom why anyone should be happy while others are in so much pain. Sophie explains, “The Germans were our enemies and it was a weapon – just like guns... It’s dreadful, but all war is dreadful. You don’t understand” (14). Wynne concludes that she certainly has no

desire to understand this detestable part of human nature, as her generous idealism would never allow her to take pleasure in the destruction of others.

Though an attempt to argue that the British were not involved in the destruction caused by the Great Wars is unfounded, Wynne exemplifies the best qualities of the perfect British citizen, making her a veritable poster child for what it means to be a young English girl in the era of conflict. She is vibrant, intelligent, and desires a world in which peace is the standard, not the exception. Further, from a moral standpoint, she has no tolerance for any disregard for human life and cannot fathom governments that might promote such depravity. She believes that the English system is ultimately good, never allowing the types of horrors that other countries do. For Stevenson's audience, reading this novel in 1940, the evil forces at play would undoubtedly have been recognized as the Axis Powers, and, more specifically, as the German war machine. Thus, Wynne becomes the stalwart British citizen, interested in, above all else, the preservation of a decidedly English way of life. She is an unrealistic character in the sense that she is afforded nothing but positive experiences, but she stands as testament to an ideal of English purity.

Franz von Heiden, on the other hand, represents a very different set of beliefs and national identity, though Stevenson characterizes him as an individual somewhat removed – at least by one generation – from becoming an “evil other” to be feared. Franz's father is a Nazi working for German intelligence; but the young von Heiden, despite this influence, is seldom judgmental or overtly resistant to the ways of his English relatives. Still, Wynne finds his behavior awkward and foreign, at least at first. Further, Franz's physical presence is rigid and imposing, though this makes him more of an oddity than a threat to the residents of Fernacres.

While waiting for the train to arrive, Wynne decides that she is no fan of her cousin's name, concluding that it sounds ugly and alien, an obvious example of her pro-English prejudice. Still, she has high hopes for Franz's arrival and is disappointed when his voice seems devoid of emotion upon their meeting. The account of their first encounter is less than promising for the young heroine. Stevenson writes:

His gravity was the first "difference" that struck Wynne. He did not smile easily, and this made him seem much older than his years. His English was good (though a trifle pedantic)...Perhaps she had hoped for too much. Wynne was used to a good deal of attention from the males of her acquaintance and although Franz was polite and pleasant he had treated her as if she were fifty years old and had a hare lip... (20) But Wynne, the perpetual optimist, believes that her influence will change Franz and make him more like her and her friends, a task she undertakes immediately and with fervor.

Major Worthington sees something in Franz that Wynne does not or cannot recognize. His first glimpse of the young German is through the window of his room, as he watches Franz exercising on the lawn. He sees his sister-in-law's cousin as "a blond giant," exercising mechanically and purposefully. Commenting to his servant, Hartley, the Major says, "It would be nice to watch if you didn't know what was at the back of it...if you didn't know that the boy is preparing his body for war. To me there's something pretty grim in that thought" (33). In response, Hartley exclaims, "I've seen lots of queer things, but a Nazi in Fernacres garden" (33). At first glance, both the Major and Hartley know that Franz is part of the German regime and assume, rightfully, that there is some ulterior motive for his presence in England.

The British, at the time the novel was written, would have been well-acquainted with this image of the German training for battle. According to Petra Rau in *English Modernism, National Identity, and the Germans, 1890 - 1950*, the Germans believed the body to be a mechanical entity, in need of “regular maintenance, expert advice and educated management” in order to produce young men capable of carrying out the orders of the German military operation (141). Through this training, the Germans, at least in the eyes of the British, lost elements of humanity, becoming more machines than men.

But for all the faults presumed inherent in the idea of the German bodily machine, Wynne’s first acknowledged attraction to Franz comes as a result of his physical abilities. When Wynne, Roy (her Naval officer brother), Harry (Roy’s shipmate), and Franz go swimming at the nearby cove, Franz impresses all present with his perfect-form swan dive. Stevenson writes, “Franz stood for a moment on the rock, his hands above his head, and then he swung them outwards and backwards and soared into the air...his body seemed to float in the air...and then, curving downwards and straightening out, it entered the water without a splash” (“English” 76). For Wynne, this exhibition was “a perfect thing” and “would last forever” (76). Though this training is foreign to his English relatives, it is, in part, the springboard for his transformation from the strict German youth to the warm and loving British man, as Wynne begins to view him with different eyes and sentiments.

Franz’s purpose for coming to Fernacres, unbeknownst to the Braithwaite family though suspected by some, is discovered by Major Worthington, who, secretly being an agent for British intelligence himself, decides to intercept Franz’s outgoing mail. Franz is tasked with writing letters to his Nazi father describing the temperament of the English

people. He is not supposed to reveal military secrets or provide groundbreaking information, but is to observe the British way of life and gauge the attitudes toward war and, more specifically, towards the Germans and their policies. Early on, Franz discovers he is unable to send his father the information he desires, as the English have not turned out to be the merely “lazy and effete and pleasure loving” people Franz expected (83). There appear to be cracks forming in Franz’s alliance with the Nazi party very soon after his arrival. He writes, “I have told them about our Youth Movement and have tried to interest them in the Nazi doctrine but they hold different views. They are very content and do not want war but if war should come I believe they would fight well. They are stronger than they look” (84). Major Worthington and Colonel Carter, to whom the Major has given the letter, agree that Franz’s father will no doubt find this news “unpalatable,” agreeing that the young man is “the best type of German” (84). Colonel Carter explains:

You have the best type of German, kind and good and talented – you have Goethe and Schiller, Wagner and Strauss, who saw so much beauty in life and had the genius to convey this beauty to their fellow men and you have the other side of the picture, the German who is dominated by an inferiority complex, who thinks he’s being unfairly treated and sees insults where none are intended. It is these men who are taught to believe that, compared with other races, the German is a god and can do no wrong. (85)

One would assume that the Colonel, as a high ranking official in the British military, is an authoritative representative of the general mindset present in the Empire.

But Franz is beginning to discover this for himself. When swimming with his companions, he tells them of the Wandervögel Youth Group, with which he had spent a great deal of time hiking, camping, and communing with his fellow German teens. As he describes the group, he is keenly aware that he is painting a picture for them that is not entirely accurate. Stevenson writes, “He had said nothing of the sordid side, of the intrigues, and jealousies and promiscuous love affairs which flourished like weeds in the hotbed of Nazi Youth...*they* would have been horrified” (73). According to John R. Gillis, in the article “Conformity and Rebellion: Contrasting Styles of English and German Youth, 1900-33,” the Wandervögel was characterized by “its nudism and occult practices...producing bizarre...patterns of behavior” (257). Though the 1938 teens of Fernacres are unaware of the practices of the Nazi youth camps, by 1940, the English would have had a more accurate understanding of them, as evidenced by Stevenson’s retroactive knowledge of the indoctrination and exploitation of German children.

Franz also realizes that what he knows of Hitler is incongruent with his friends’ understanding. In a conversation between Franz and Harry, the two young men argue about the intentions of the German leader. Franz says, “We like to obey our Leader. We are agreed that our Leader knows best what is good for us. He tells us how to exercise our bodies and be fit, he orders all our days” (“English” 74). Harry, becoming defensive, responds, “And what does your leader think of you...I’ll tell you what he thinks in his own words. He said you were ‘a great stupid flock of easily driven sheep’” (75). Harry, of course, is extrapolating what he, as a British military officer, has been told – by British media – about Hitler’s lack of appreciation for the German populace. In fact, Adolf Hitler refers to the Germans in *Mein Kampf* as “the masses of our people, whose sheepish

docility corresponds to their want of intelligence” (Hitler). Still, Franz is dumbfounded by Harry’s assertion against Hitler and argues that “no country could be happy and prosperous if everyone did exactly as he liked,” but realizing that his friend will not be swayed, he resigns himself to silence. He sits on the beach feeling defeated “and, although the sun was still warm upon his back, Franz shuddered involuntarily” (“English” 75). For the first time in his life, he has been forced to understand that the German way is not one that is easily accepted by others.

This German way – the individual’s total submission to authority – is also strikingly apparent when Sergeant White and his deputy come to Fernacres looking for Wynne. When they are admitted to the drawing room where Franz is busy reading, the young German is alarmed. Stevenson writes, “They stood in the middle of the pretty room, big and bulky in their imposing blue uniforms, and poor Franz was so terrified at the sight of them and at the implications of their unexpected visit that for a few moments he was glued to his chair” (48). Franz asks the policemen what their business is with Wynne, but the information is refused, though in a decidedly playful manner, which is lost on the poor Franz. Wynne has done nothing wrong, but Franz, based on his knowledge of the Gestapo, believes that the end is near for her. According to Eric A. Johnson, in *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans*, the average German citizen had every reason to be afraid of the German police, as incidents as relatively insignificant as domestic disputes could “set the Gestapo in motion and lead to one’s ruin” (254). Franz has been taught to expect brute force and unwavering intolerance from the police.

Whereas Franz lives with a deep-seated fear of the authoritative forces within his own limited world-view, Wynne is a complete stranger to any sense of danger lurking outside the door of her idyllic home. She is unlike anything Franz has ever seen, with a vibrancy that attracts and enraptures all who come into contact with her. She is the epitome of youth and, quite often, Franz finds himself feeling remorse for the fact that “he had never been really young – in the way that Wynne was young” (70). With her charming way of putting people at ease and her ability to see past socially constructed class systems, Wynne has amassed a great number of friends “of all ages and conditions of life” throughout the town of Chellford (19). In addition, she volunteers as a leader of Girl Guides, a group similar to the Boy Scouts. When Franz learns this from Wynne’s friend Claire, he is surprised, as he has heretofore only seen her entertaining herself and others. Claire tells him, “Wynne...[is] not idle in the way you think. In Germany all the social work is in government control, but here it is different. Britain is fortunate in possessing a large unpaid army of social workers” (43). Not only is Wynne occupied with pleasing her immediate friends and family, she is also a citizen of the British Empire, working for the betterment of her fellow countrymen on a strictly *volunteer* basis. This, of course, is in stark contrast to Franz’s involvement with the Wandervögel, which was not only involuntary, but aimed at molding him into part of the unified and uniform body of subjects loyal to Hitler.

Despite their differences, Wynne becomes entrenched in what she considers to be the “education of Franz” (39). She does more than just advise Franz on his speech, hair, and wardrobe. In an effort to further Anglicize him, she decides, rather flippantly, to begin calling him Frank, which she argues will help him “feel at home” in England (78).

Sophie Braithwaite believes this to be a “dangerous” exercise, believing that one’s “name was a part of [oneself] and had a direct influence on your personality” (79). Franz agrees to the change, deciding that from then on, everyone in Chellford should call him Frank instead. By eschewing his name, he is, in a direct way, further distancing himself from his German identity, assuming an English one in its place.

Frank’s transformation cannot wholly be attributed to Wynne’s influence, though. Throughout the novel, he mentions the ways the country itself has altered his personality and mental state. He refers to this phenomenon as the “English air,” which has a holistic sway over him. He declares that the “air of England is very wholesome” and that it makes him “feel younger and [his] heart more light” (95, 94). Thus, one might infer that the country has the capability of soothing troubled minds and shifting learned (negative) behaviors merely because it exists, as if England possesses some kind of magical force that cannot be denied even by its enemies.

As farfetched as this may sound, Stevenson is careful to give readers an “out” – a way to accept the changes that are taking place within Franz. Though some British readers in 1940 might have agreed that England was a far better place than Germany at that time, they perhaps would have been less likely to believe that there was enough “good” within the German people to be so easily transformed. Thus, Stevenson is careful to constantly reiterate that Franz is, indeed, only “half-German” and, in fact, downplaying the German side of his lineage, she more often refers to him as “half-English.” In the first chapter, as Sophie reminds Wynne that they “mustn’t forget” Franz’s ties to England, so, too, is the book itself reminding its readers that this is a fact that must remain in the forefront of their minds (9). Franz is able to be shaped and molded because

he cannot be fully claimed by German discipline and indoctrination. He is of course equally English, capable of being assimilated into British culture.

For all their sway, though, none of these factors can fully remove the German training and subsequent guilt from Frank's mind. Major Worthington and Wynne believe that even though Franz changed drastically during his stay with them, he is "really and truly a German at heart" (113). His father calls him back to Germany, citing his son's behavior in England as "idle and extravagant," arguing that "it is uneconomic to spend German money in another land" (108). But Frank, who has also begun to realize that he is in love with Wynne, defies his father's wishes and asks Major Worthington to secure him a bookkeeping post in London. He deliberately disobeys Herr von Heiden, but he could have just as easily stayed at Fernacres to be with Wynne. Still, recalling that upbringing, Frank concludes, "It was the height of folly to think of marrying an English girl" (104). He also believes that he can only lead her "into danger and misery" and must leave as "quickly as he could" (105).

The English Air is a romance novel, but Stevenson utilizes the war-time climate of World War II Britain to "[expand] the possibilities of the genre" (Hayne 642). At its most rudimentary, the love affair between Franz and Wynne can be relegated to the likes of other novels in the genre, with its fairly standard elements of how the characters become attracted to one another. There is more than that here, though, and at times Stevenson seems to be writing a novel for the homeland masses, not only exploiting their anxieties about the war, but also creating a space for them to revel in their British nationalism. Wynne embodies all that is good in the world; she is young, beautiful, intelligent, and philanthropic, clinging to the idealism of an age that has been lost long

ago. Above all else, she believes England to be the best place on Earth, housing the most moral and patriotic citizens. She does not cower in the presence of the collective enemy and, rather, chooses to teach Franz about the strength of the British Empire while also showing him the beauty of her homeland. Because of her pro-English sentiments and her unwavering “goodness,” she is able to bring light to the seemingly dark person – a German subject.

In many ways, the novel becomes less a romance story and more a piece of propaganda, elevating the British above all others and, more specifically, above the Nazi German Empire. In the 1968 edition of the book, the publishers included a brief statement as way of introduction, which reads, “The characters in this novel are imaginary; the opinions expressed by them are their own opinions – the natural outcome of their circumstances and individuality – and must in no case be taken to represent the author’s views” (5). As politically correct as this may sound, it also detracts from what seems to be Stevenson’s pro-British agenda. As evidenced by the 1973 “Author’s Foreword” to the *Mrs. Tim* series mentioned earlier in this chapter, Stevenson was in no way apologetic for her attitudes toward the German people, as she and those around her lived in constant fear of the atrocities their German foes might inflict.

Franz becomes the outlet for these attitudes, though Stevenson gives him the “privilege” of being half-English, which, combined with the ultimate goal of the romance genre, allows him to showcase the worst of the German regime without being personally consumed by its harsh rules and regulations. Thus, she is able to create the love story between Franz and Wynne, which would be less palatable if Franz were a stalwart

representative of the Hitler Youth. In the end, the “English air” is able to triumph over German indoctrination, paving the way for the young cousins to pursue a life together.

Because of its relatively positive approach to the state of the British homefront and the people residing there, the novel might be less appealing to modern audiences, who could potentially view it as outdated or unrealistic. Still, it must also be understood that Stevenson, like other writers of her age, was faced with the difficult task of responding to the real and terrifying world of war, which, by its very nature, created widely varied spaces of discourse and proliferated long-held negative attitudes between the British and German people. According to Gill Plain, “It is impossible to identify a single voice that speaks for women in wartime... The story of the impact of the Second World War is encoded behind a series of myths, facades, and fantasies... all these texts are war stories waiting to be decoded. That we don’t recognize them as such is perhaps an indication of how little we understand the [war]” (123). Thus, though Stevenson’s characters seem static and idealized compared to those in novels by authors like Woolf, whose characters explored deeper and darker attitudes toward the world and war, the former’s accounts of war-time Britain cannot be disregarded as inaccurate. In the recently published “An Autobiographical Sketch,” Stevenson explains why she creates her characters in this way. She writes:

Sometimes I have been accused of making my characters “too nice”. I have been told that my stories are “too pleasant”, but the fact is I write of people as I find them and am fond of my fellow human beings. Perhaps I have been fortunate but in all my wanderings I have met very few thoroughly unpleasant people, so I find it difficult to write about them. (213)

Stevenson, in an attempt to negotiate the unpleasantness of the changing world around her, “[lives] in war while existing out of war” (Plain 123). In other words, the portrayal of characters like Wynne and Franz serve as a reminder to Stevenson and her readers that, even amidst death and destruction, there still exist beauty and love (Chase ix).

Woolf, on the other hand, was an “active destroyer of a propagandist vision of English rural ‘innocence’” (Plain 124). As a result, her novels can be seen as “something more than a vehicle for entertainment,” filled with far more ideological prose than that of a romance novelist (Maslen 36). In fact, Woolf, in *A Room of One’s Own*, denounces war as a destroyer of previous hopes. She writes, “Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other’s eyes that romance was killed?” (15). For scholars, especially, the seemingly more “real” emotional response to war warrants greater acclaim, but literary critics are not the intended audience of the genre. According to Janice Radway, “[Romance readers] are perfectly willing to admit that the romantic stories themselves are implausible because the characters are ‘better’ than real people and because events resolve themselves unambiguously. Nevertheless, they also believe implicitly in the accuracy of the fiction’s rendering of the material world” (188). In other words, war-time romance readers, mostly women, did not expect these novels to fully and accurately reflect all possible accounts of life on the homefront. Rather, they were searching for stories that “[engaged] at some level with women’s concerns, however romantic or aspirational those fictions might be” (Philips 14).

The English Air served and continues to serve this purpose for romance readers. Wynne and Franz, no matter how flat or stereotypical they may seem, reflect an idealism

that both Stevenson and her readers needed during World War II. Similarly, modern readers of *The English Air* are given the opportunity to view the British homefront in optimistic terms, unlike the ways in which many canonical authors approached the fiction of the era. Though it is hard to imagine such a romantic reality in the face of war, Stevenson offered her readers a chance to see beyond – to escape, perhaps – the horrors at their doorsteps.

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