‘The novelist … must write about politics’:

Mary Agnes Hamilton and the Politics of Modern Fiction

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Writing in the book review columns of the feminist periodical *Time and Tide*, the novelist, journalist and future Labour MP Mary Agnes Hamilton stated in November 1920 that: ‘Politics overshadow the whole of our horizon. To tell the artist … to leave them alone is ridiculous … he [*sic*] must write about politics.’ Over the course of a decade Hamilton reviewed hundreds of books for *Time and Tide* – many of them novels – and in this writing she returns repeatedly to the theme of art and politics, rejecting a high modernist regard for aestheticism and insisting on the political responsibility of the artist. This article situates Hamilton’s book reviews alongside the account she left of her Bloomsbury connections in her memoir *Remembering My Good Friends* (1944) and the diary of Virginia Woolf who left several records of her encounters with Hamilton. Exploring the early friendship of these two writers and their conversations about writing, Section One reconstructs the political and journalistic career of Hamilton and identifies her as a possible model for Woolf’s activist character Mary Datchett in *Night and Day* (1919). Section Two analyses the combined artistic and political consciousness of Hamilton’s fourth novel published the same year, *Full Circle* (1919), and reads Hamilton’s rehabilitation of the novel as a vehicle for politics in *Time and Tide* as a rejoinder not only to Bloomsbury aesthetics but also to socialist fellow-travellers who had turned to the theatre and abandoned the novelistic form. Challenging contemporary distinctions between ‘serious’ and ‘light’ reading, Hamilton adds further to early twentieth-century debates about modern fiction and, I argue, deserves recognition as an important woman radical of the interwar years.

Writing in the book review columns of the feminist periodical *Time and Tide*, novelist, journalist and future Labour MP, Mary Agnes Hamilton (1884–1962) stated in November 1920 that:

> Politics overshadow the whole of our horizon. To tell the artist, in whatever medium he works, to leave them alone is ridiculous. The fact may have disastrous artistic reactions, but there it is. In so far as the novelist, in particular, is attempting to render the strange, irregular rhythm of life – of contemporary life – he must write about politics. (12 Nov 1920: 550)

The review is printed under the heading ‘Political Fiction’ and is an articulate riposte to Roger Fry’s famous statement that ‘in art we have no … moral responsibility’ (1909: 15), an artificial separation of art and politics that was long definitional to our received understanding of Bloomsbury aesthetics and the artistic movement of modernism. More recently, Jessica Berman has challenged ‘the distinction usually drawn between politically engaged writing and self-consciously aesthetic or experimental modernism’ (2011: 9), a

distinction undermined in Hamilton's political comment above which is couched in language that is itself very 'modernistic' ('strange', 'irregular rhythm', 'contemporary life'). In a subsequent review Hamilton observes that 'the emergence of the idea of form' is the most obvious recent development in the English novel, but she also identifies 'another landmark' in modern fiction that she considers 'exceedingly striking', namely the 'treatment of background'. She continues: 'In a very large proportion of modern novels there is an attempt […] to give the impression of the great world behind, surging round, encompassing and to some extent conditioning the smaller, more intimate and closely studied world which is the actual theatre of the main action' (*T&T*, 28 Apr 1922: 402). Hamilton's emphasis on 'politics', 'background' and 'the great world behind' the lives of individual characters underscores her social concerns as a writer, and her resistance to the more inward-turn of the modernist novel. But these reviews are also evidence of her participation in a wider conversation about the art of modern fiction, captured most famously in Virginia Woolf's 1925 essay on 'Modern Fiction' (first published as 'Modern Novels' in 1919). Hamilton inhabited some of the same circles as Woolf in the years during and immediately after the First World War. Placing Hamilton alongside her better-known contemporary, this article recovers Hamilton's contribution to debates about the novel in the years 1919–1926 and argues that she deserves recognition as an important woman radical of the interwar period.[1]

Personal Encounters: Mary Agnes Hamilton and Virginia Woolf

First, who was Mary Agnes Hamilton? Author of nine novels as well as numerous non-fiction books on Labour Party history (including biographies of J. Ramsay MacDonald and Sidney and Beatrice Webb) Hamilton was acquainted not only with Woolf but also many other leading literary and political luminaries of her day and yet she has almost completely

[1] I am thinking here of the excellent volume edited by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai, *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals: British Women Writers 1889–1939*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

disappeared from view in literary-historical scholarship.[2] Daughter of the Scottish philosopher Robert Adamson (1852–1902), and Manchester-born Margaret Duncan, Hamilton was raised in Manchester and received her high-school education in Aberdeen and then Glasgow where her father was appointed Professor of Logic in 1895. In 1901 she took up a scholarship at Newnham College, Cambridge, to study classics, history and economics, and it was here that she developed her interest in politics, joining the University's 'Political' society which, 'organized like a parliament' (Hamilton 1944: 47), prefigured her later work as a Labour MP for Blackburn from 1929–1931.[3] Hamilton's primary political commitment was initially pacifist rather than socialist. As she tells us in her 1953 memoir *Uphill All The Way*: 'Pacifism, not economic conviction, took me into the Independent Labour Party [ILP] in 1914, because it was the one body of people who shouted that war ought not to be' (30). Hamilton was also an original member of the pacifist Union of Democratic Control (UDC), and as she records in her first memoir, *Remembering My Good Friends*: 'for these organizations I worked, with them I lived' (1944: 72). During the war and its immediate aftermath Hamilton came to know well most of the leading people in the ILP including Margaret Bondfield, Philip and Ethel Snowden, and Ramsay MacDonald (1944: 107). She was a founding member of the socialist 1917 Club, and a regular guest of Lady Ottoline Morrell whose homes at 44, Bedford Square and Garsington Manor provided regular meeting grounds for, in Hamilton's words, 'everybody who was anybody in the anti-war group' (1944: 78). Hamilton's own 'tiny flat' at the Adelphi just off the Strand also became one of London's many 'political talking centres'. Hubert Henderson and Leonard Woolf were

[2] On Hamilton's fiction, Maria Aline Seabra Ferreira's entry on Hamilton in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Biography* remains the fullest record. Two of Hamilton's early novels (*Dead Yesterday*, 1916; *Follow My Leader*, 1922) receive occasional attention in studies of women's writing and the First World War (e.g. Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, London: Routledge, 1994) or of 1920s socialist fiction (e.g. H. Gustav Klaus, *The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982, and David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel*, London: Macmillan, 1978).

[3] Hamilton first ran for Parliament in 1924 as a Labour candidate but did not win.

among those who assembled there ‘to work out plans for the future of the world, on League of Nations lines’ and who wrote for ‘a small monthly *War and Peace*, devoted to constructive effort on these lines’ (Hamilton 1944: 135–6).

These organizations, networks and associations shaped Hamilton’s life-long commitment to the Labour Party (or the labour movement) and the peace movement, and undoubtedly inform her pronouncements on the politics of modern fiction. Many of her own novels have a strong pacifist and/or socialist thematic focus: *Dead Yesterday* (1916), based on the conversations of her friends in 1914, is ‘inspired by intense feeling against war’ (Hamilton 1944: 64; 72); *Full Circle* (1919), discussed below, is set during the years that saw the formation of the Labour Party and explores the appeal of a more revolutionary form of socialism. In *The Last Fortnight* (1920), which draws on the experiences of Hamilton’s brief and unhappy marriage, the heroine is deeply involved with the concerns of English laundresses on strike over pay and working conditions.[4] *Follow My Leader* (1922), about the conversion to Socialism of a young woman who falls in love with a trade unionist, anticipates Hamilton’s shift of allegiance from the predominantly middle-class ILP to the more working class and trade union side of the Labour movement.[5] This novel, placed alongside Woolf’s novel of the same year, *Jacob’s Room* (1922), is indicative of the very different aesthetic choices made by these two writers. Reviewing *Follow My Leader* for *Time and Tide* in October 1922 the poet and novelist Sylvia Lynd was critical of what she considered to be Hamilton’s limitations as an artist. Stating that the book ‘is written in a mood more suited to successful canvassing than to novel writing’ she concludes: ‘We hope that Mrs. Hamilton will not allow her excellent gift for fiction to waste itself in dreary political channels. The

[4] In 1905 Hamilton married the economist C. J. Hamilton, a colleague at the University College of South Wales, Cardiff, where she taught briefly after completing her degree at Cambridge. See Ferreira 1999: 142 and Hamilton 1953: 25–6.

[5] In *Uphill All The Way* Hamilton states: ‘I found myself happier and more at ease in the Labour Party, with its predominantly Trade Union membership, than I had, for long, been in the ILP, although I was nominated [as a candidate for Parliament] by that body’ (1953: 41).

newspapers may trespass into the region of fiction if they will, but it would be lamentable for fiction to entrench itself in the muddy terrain of the newspapers' (27 Oct 1922: 1034–5). In stark contrast, Lynd describes Woolf's new novel in a review for *Time and Tide* the following month as 'the best book that Mrs. Woolf has written' and, with a critical leaning towards the aesthetics of modernism, she is particularly interested in the 'new method' deployed by its author which, she states, has the effect of 'making the ordinary narrative novel seem commonplace' (24 Nov 1922: 1137). Both published in what is often identified as the *annus mirabilis* of modernism, Hamilton's socialist novel *Follow My Leader* and Woolf's modernist experiment *Jacob's Room* not only illustrate the different trajectories these authors pursued as writers, but also the fate of political novels of the interwar period: while Woolf's work has become an established part of the literary canon, not one of Hamilton's novels remains in print.[6]

It would be eight years before Hamilton published another work of fiction, *Special Providence: A Tale of 1917* (1930), a novel set (as indicated by the date in the title) in the context of the First World War and the year of the Russian revolution. Apparently prompted by her reading of this novel Woolf wrote scathingly in her diary: 'Molly [Mary Agnes] Hamilton writes a d–d bad novel' (DIII: 296).[7] Woolf's scorn, however, overwrites a far more ambivalent relationship, one in which Hamilton held a fascination for Woolf during her early writing career and with whom she conversed about modern fiction. As Hamilton recounts in *Remembering My Good Friends* it was in the years immediately after the First World War that she visited the Woolfs 'fairly often … both at Hogarth House, and at Rodmell', and that they in turn, on occasion, came to parties in her flat (142–3). This is corroborated by Woolf's diary which during the years 1918–1923 contains several records of

[6] It is worth noting that while studies of the 'middlebrow' have greatly expanded our map of interwar fiction, radical fiction of the period remains under-represented in critical scholarship.
[7] The diary entry is dated Monday 3 March 1930.

her encounters with Hamilton. What emerges from these public and private texts, however, is the testy character of their early friendship and conversations about writing. Recalling one hot August afternoon at Rodmell when she and Woolf had talked about 'What makes one write' Hamilton states:

> A suspicion which had visited me before became a certainty: Virginia did not really care for me; I was, for her, a specimen of that, to her, queer object – the normal human being. […] All that week-end I had had a vague feeling of discomfort; it now crystallized into a certainty. I had been on the dissecting table, my anatomy being explored by surgical fingers of uncanny skill. (143)[8]

Hamilton's acute consciousness of Woolf's intense scrutiny is somewhat ironic in light of their recorded conversation in which Woolf was apparently puzzled by Hamilton's expressed motivation as a writer, namely 'an intense interest in people and an itch to understand what made them go'. According to Hamilton, Woolf said that 'People … did not much interest her; what did was the feel of life as it passed – that was what she wanted to render' (143). Although an apt description of Woolf's attempts in fiction to convey the 'myriad impressions' received by an 'ordinary mind on an ordinary day', as she puts it in the 1925 version of her 'Modern Fiction' essay (EIV: 160), in light of her diary writing the notion that people did not much interest her is surely disingenuous.

Woolf's first commentary on Hamilton occurs in an account of a weekend hosted by Lady Ottoline Morrell at Garsington, in July 1918, where Hamilton was also a guest. Likening Hamilton to 'a spaniel dog' Woolf writes: 'She [Hamilton] is a working brain worker. Hasn't a penny of her own; & has the anxious hard working brain of a professional, earning her living all the time' (DI: 173–4). In February the following year Woolf uses canine

[8] The year is possibly 1923; Woolf's diary records Hamilton as being among the guests during a weekend at Rodmell on 29 August of this year. Certainly, it is no earlier than August 1920 as the Woolfs took possession of Monk's House at Rodmell on 1 September 1919.

terms again to characterize Hamilton 'strain[ing] at her leash like the spaniel of my legend' and dehumanizes her still further by describing 'the sense she gives of a machine working at high pressure all day long – the ordinary able machine of the professional working woman' (DI: 312). Woolf's extreme reactions to Hamilton betray what critics have identified as her 'ambivalence regarding the value and desirability of "professionalism"' (Elliott & Wallace 1994: 70) but also her fascination with the details of Hamilton's professional labour. In May 1920 she reflected in her diary: 'Odd to me that life should require "professional women". She [Hamilton] is reading 500 novels, at 5/- each, for a prize competition; & had a batch of sickly stuff to masticate in the train going home' (DII: 35). Woolf's distaste is palpable, but there are also traces of professional competition mixed with respect. Towards the end of the same year she records with precision the salary of £570 that Hamilton was offered when appointed assistant editor on the late W. T. Stead's journal *Review of Reviews* (DII: 79), and she would later observe in her diary that Hamilton '[f]aces more facts every night than I do in a year' (DII: 262–3). Crucially, while Woolf also earned money through journalism to supplement her private income, her privileged position meant that she could afford to be selective in the work she undertook. In contrast, Hamilton, tells us in *Remembering My Good Friends* that: 'Up to 1929 I earned my living as a journalist […] I am one of the vast majority who have "nothing behind" them: no unearned resources on which to fall back, if out of work' (1944: 144).

Hamilton's 1944 memoir provides a valuable record of her journalistic affiliations in the years during and after the war.[9] As detailed in this text, her career in journalism began in 1914 when she joined the staff of *The Economist* (64) then edited by the 'ultra-pacifist' F. W. Hirst (72). When Hirst left, she went with him to another weekly journal of political economy, *Common Sense* (72), its offices at 44 Essex Street 'a sort of pacifist G.H.Q.' and

[9] Surprisingly, she makes no reference to her eleven-year association with *Time and Tide*.

from 1917 ‘the centre of what was known as the Lansdowne movement’ organized in support of the famous letter written by Lord Lansdowne in favour of a negotiated peace with Germany (85). In 1920 Hamilton left *Common Sense*, shortly before its demise in February 1921, and became assistant editor on the *Review of Reviews* which was attempting to revive its fortunes since the death of W. T. Stead in 1912 under the editorship of former war correspondent Philip Gibbs (144). This association was short-lived. By the late summer of 1921 the paper had been sold, and the following year Hamilton became assistant editor of the ILP organ the *New Leader* (formerly the *Labour Leader*) which had been newly reconstituted under the editorship of H. N. Brailsford (146). As this reconstruction from her memoir shows, Hamilton’s work as a journalist was also deeply connected to political organizations and causes, and as such it further contrasts with Woolf’s journalistic career where her professional reviewing for such publications as the *Times Literary Supplement* could be categorized as ‘literary journalism’, constructed by modernists as a sphere of cultural activity in order to maintain artistic integrity (Collier 2006).[10] Arguably, however, it is Woolf’s anxiety about her own relationship to the literary marketplace during her early career as a novelist that further fuels the contempt expressed towards Hamilton in her diary during these years.

This anxiety is particularly striking in an entry from March 1919, written after Woolf had been to tea with Hamilton at her flat off the Strand. The date of this meeting is significant. Woolf had recently completed her second novel *Night and Day* (she would deliver the manuscript to her publisher the following month) and Hamilton’s fourth novel *Full Circle* would be published the same year. Woolf writes:

[10] Michael H. Whitworth notes that the *TLS* was ‘the most important of [Woolf’s] “patrons” from 1905 to 1923’ (2005: 88).

> Mrs Hamilton made me feel a little professional, for she had her table strewn with manuscripts, a book open on the desk, & she began by asking me about my novel; & then we talked about reviewing, & I was interested to hear who had reviewed Martin Schüler, & was a little ashamed of being interested. […] The truth is that Molly Hamilton with all her ability to think like a man, & her strong serviceable mind, & her independent, self-respecting life is not a writer. But we exchanged the plots of our novels, & said 'How very interesting –' (DI: 255)

Made to 'feel a little professional' herself as she enters Hamilton's flat with its table strewn with manuscripts and books for review, Woolf's 'shame' at being 'interested' in who had reviewed the novel by Romer Wilson, registers an awareness of what Joyce Wexler has described as the 'ideological contradiction between art and money' that pervaded modernist culture (1997: xii).[11] Significantly, Woolf's comments are immediately preceded by references to 'bits of literary gossip' relating to the *Athenaeum* which strike her as 'slightly discreditable' since they 'point perhaps to one's becoming a professional, a hack of the type of Mrs W. K. Clifford' (a friend of Woolf's father and a prolific writer of books and journalism) 'who used to know exactly what everyone was paid, & who wrote what, & all the rest of it' (DI: 254). As Anthea Trodd has observed, for Woolf 'the type of the woman hack' embodies 'the dark reverse of the woman artist' (1998: 44). In another diary entry written the following week Woolf compares Hamilton unfavourably with Katherine Mansfield who, she declares, although now 'in the very heart of the professional world – 4 books on her table to review' is 'not the least of a hack. I don't feel as I feel with Molly Hamilton that is [to] say, ashamed of the inkpot' (DI: 258). The comparison is instructive. Mansfield was the one writer of whose work Woolf ever felt jealous, and, as Sydney Janet Kaplan has argued, her

[11] Romer Wilson was the pseudonym of British novelist Florence Wilson. *Martin Schüler* (1919) was her first novel.

experimentation with the short story form preceded Woolf's own innovations in modern fiction (1991: 146; 3). Mansfield's involvement in 'the professional world', therefore, is offset in Woolf's eyes by her qualifications as an artist, in a way that Hamilton's is not. In fact, as we shall see, in *Full Circle* Hamilton broke with convention more radically than did Woolf in *Night and Day*, despite Woolf's declaration in her diary that Hamilton is 'not a writer'. But it would seem that for Woolf Hamilton is too identified with the 'wrong' kind of journalism, or, not sufficiently dedicated to the life of the artist to secure a position on the 'right' side of the literature/journalism divide.

In light of the above it is tempting to speculate that Hamilton may have been another model for the character of Mary Datchett in Woolf's 1919 novel *Night and Day*.[12] Recognized as 'the most overtly politically and socially engaged character in the novel' (Jones 2016: 91), Mary Datchett is commonly seen to be modelled on Margaret Llewelyn Davies, niece of Emily Davies, the founder of Girton College.[13] Davies was President of the Women's Co-operative Guild and a founding member of the People's Suffrage Federation (PSF) which was committed to full adult suffrage including votes for all the working men who did not have a vote before 1918, rather than votes for women. Virginia Woolf held meetings of the Women's Co-operative Guild in her house for many years and wrote an introduction to *Life as We Have Known It* edited by Davies in which working women gave accounts of their own lives.[14] In the years before the war Hamilton was involved in the suffrage movement, although we don't know in what capacity (Banks 1990: 90), and in Woolf's narrative Mary Datchett's departure from suffrage campaigning to work for Mr

[12] I am indebted to Kathryn Laing for this suggestion. While Woolf's composition of *Night and Day* predates most of the diary commentaries on Hamilton, the earliest of these (July 1918) was written a full four months before she completed a first draft of the manuscript which she continued revising until March 1919. See Whitworth 2005: 151.

[13] Julia Briggs claims that 'Mary Datchett is – to some extent – a portrait of Margaret Llewelyn Davies' (2006: 92).

[14] Margaret Llewelyn Davies, ed. *Life as We Have Known It, by co-operative working women*, London: Hogarth Press, 1931.

Basnett's 'Society for the Education of Democracy' (Woolf 1919: 374) might easily mirror Hamilton's political trajectory from feminist to socialist activism.[15] Hamilton would have been much closer in age than Davies to the twenty-five year old Mary in the year 1909 or 1910 when the novel is set, and Mary's flat just off the Strand corresponds with Hamilton's address at the Adelphi.[16] The scene at the end of the novel, therefore, wherein Katharine Hilbery and Ralph Denham view Mary illuminated at her window 'working out her plans far into the night – her plans for the good of a world that none of them were ever to know' (533) could be influenced by her knowledge of Hamilton as much as Davies'.[17] Significantly, in an early diary entry of 1919 Woolf includes Hamilton with Davies in a list of people she identifies as friends outside her intellectual and artistic circles who belong rather to 'the set that runs parallel but does not mix, distinguished by their social & political character' (DI: 234). This characteristic separation of art and politics is, however, an artificial construction, as suggested by the quasi-religious aura afforded to Mary Datchett at the end of *Night and Day* in the force of the illumination which 'burnt itself' into the minds of the watchers below. In this unmistakable echo of Woolf's famous phrase, in her 'Modern Novels' essay of the same year, concerning life as 'a luminous halo, surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end' (EIII: 33) we might possibly read the fusing of Hamilton's political commitment with Woolf's literary vision.

Political Fiction: *Full Circle* (1919) and *Time and Tide* (1920–1926)

[15] According to Banks, Hamilton's commitment to feminism was 'always a marginal one' (1990: 91). Hamilton is not listed as an individual member in the institutional papers of the PSF, but her socialist convictions would have placed her in sympathy with what Sandra Stanley Holton has described as the 'feminist-labour alliance' at its heart (Jones 2016: 73). My thanks to Clara Jones for sharing the PSF records with me.

[16] In her diary for the 1910s and 1920s Woolf repeatedly refers to Davies as 'elderly'. Born in 1861 Davies was considerably older than Hamilton. In 1909 she would have been 48; Hamilton 25.

[17] In a letter to Janet Case in 1910 Woolf described seeing 'Miss LL. Davies at a lighted window in Barton St with all the conspirators round her' (LI: 442) If this recollection informs the lighted window scene in *Night and Day*, it has been transposed from Westminster to the Strand and the subject represented as a writer and alone rather than in company.

Full Circle (1919), Hamilton's critically neglected novel published in the same year as Woolf's *Night and Day*, is a fine example of this lesser-known author's combined artistic and political consciousness.[18] Set roughly in the years 1900–1906, the novel makes socialism and art its central subjects in a narrative that is focused on the lives of two members of the Quihampton family, Roger and Bridget, and their relationship to a character who is the novel's symbolic centre, a revolutionary socialist named Wilfrid Elstree. The novel's time frame corresponds with the formation of the parliamentary Labour Party, from the establishment in 1900 of the Labour Representative Committee (LRC) by the trade unions together with the ILP, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Fabians, to the LRC's election to parliament of thirty candidates in the General Election of 1906.[19] It also corresponds with the rise to executive prominence in the ILP during this period of the middle-class trio of J. Bruce Glasier, Philip Snowdon and Ramsay MacDonald, whose rejection of Marxism in favour of progressivism gave the ILP, in David Kynaston's words, 'a contemporary intellectual respectability and a liberal-centred outlook' (1976: 149). Against this backdrop, through the novel's narrative interest in Wilfrid Elstree (who in Part Two of the novel returns from Russia and explicitly defines himself against 'the Webb school' of Socialism (342)) Hamilton explores the appeal of a revolutionary element in socialism that had considerable traction at the time she was writing the novel.[20] Donald Sassoon identifies the years 1918–1920 as unparalleled for their revolutionary potential with virtually all the Communist Parties of Western Europe spawned in this era (2010: 32). In her 1953 memoir Hamilton tells us that in the immediate post-war years she 'made a brief effort to be a

[18] To my knowledge there has been no critical discussion of this novel.
[19] Part Two of Hamilton's novel identifies 'the General Election of 1905' in the present moment, which is about five years on from events in Part One. This could be a misprint (there was no General Election in 1905). The LRC renamed itself the Labour Party after the 1906 election.
[20] Beatrice and Sidney Webb were key figures in the Fabian Society which favoured progressivism and constitutional reform over revolution. At one point in Hamilton's novel (255) a likeness is drawn between Wilfrid and two leading socialist figures of working-class representation, Keir Hardie and Tom Mann.

Marxist' (33) and in 1918 sat on a committee to draw up for the ILP a new constitution along more Marxian lines (35). *Full Circle* is in many ways a novel in which its author can be seen to be working out her political identity and beliefs in relation to key figures in the history of the socialist movement, much in the same way that Woolf's *Night and Day* has been read as a novel in which Woolf worked out her writing identity in relation to her influential forbears and literary past.[21]

Crucially, however, for the purposes of this article, *Full Circle* is also a novel that reflects self-consciously upon art, and especially the links between art and socialism, from the poetry that Wilfrid composes and reads aloud to the Quihampton siblings (who spend a lot of their time 'arguing about the arts' (4)), to Hamilton's use of Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* (1892) to stage the personal dramas that unfold around Wilfrid in Parts One and Two of the novel.[22] Raphael Samuel et al. have characterized the period of the Second International (1890–1914) as one in which the socialist movement 'worshipped at the shrine of art' and conceived of itself as 'a messenger of high culture, bringing education and enlightenment to the masses' (1985: xvii). This history of socialism provides an explanatory context for Roger's adulation for Wilfrid in Hamilton's novel; his belief in Wilfrid as a poet and exaggerated respect for everything about him recalls a moment when socialism was 'the talismanic term for the beautiful' and 'transcendental longings, aesthetic ideals of beauty and ambition for cultural attainment [were] fused in a single discourse' (Samuel et al. 1985: 5–7).

Other characters in the novel, including Wilfrid himself, are not convinced by him as a poet.[23] But they are captivated by his powerful personality, and it is Wilfrid's individualism

[21] See Marion Dell, *Virginia Woolf's Influential Forebears: Julia Margaret Cameron, Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Julia Prinsep Stephen*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015, and Jane de Gay, *Virginia Woolf's Novels and the Literary Past*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006 (Chapter Two).
[22] This personal drama begins with Wilfrid discarding Bridget for the conventionally pretty and feminine Iris Mauldeth whom he simultaneously robs from Roger.
[23] Wilfrid won't have people think of him as a poet and speaks of his poetry as 'the best synthetic shorthand for ideas – that's all' (27).

that invites the comparison drawn by Bridget between his character and that of Solness, Ibsen's master builder (330). This individualist trait may appear to be at odds with the collectivist ideals of socialism. But as Ian Britain points out, the great Fabian dramatist George Bernard Shaw had argued in 1890 in a lecture on Ibsen that one way to socialism was through individualism, identifying in social progress the vital role played by 'pioneers' or isolated proponents of 'new developments' (1983: 43).[24] Ibsen's enormous popularity among socialists, especially among the predominantly middle-class Fabians whose concerns have been generally presumed (with the exception of Shaw) to be narrowly utilitarian, provides another important point of reference for Hamilton's novel.[25] As Britain further notes, socialists' responses to Ibsen show that they were just as interested in his capacities as a poetic dramatist as in his political, social or moral 'message' (1983: 34–5). This is further evidence of an interest in both art and politics and challenges Woolf's distinction (in her diary entry of January 1919) between literary-artistic and social-political types. Hamilton would later describe Ibsen as 'one of the masterminds of our age'; her own blend of realism and symbolism in *Full Circle*, and the novel's theatrical two-part structure, suggest his influence upon her work.[26]

Bridget's rejection of marriage in *Full Circle* has more in common with late nineteenth-century New Woman narratives than with mid-Victorian courtship fiction which provides one of the templates for Woolf's *Night and Day*. At the close of the novel, she stands alone on the pavement at Euston waiting for a bus to carry her 'eastwards' to her flat off the Strand. Feeling within her 'an extraordinary rush of love for London' she realizes that 'to be part of it, to feel it, yet to exist in oneself' (384) is something to set against the loss of

[24] This Fabian Society lecture was published in 1891 as *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*.
[25] In his larger study, *Fabianism and Culture: British Socialism and the Arts, 1884–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) Ian Britain shows that Fabian socialism was in fact deeply rooted in aesthetic and cultural concerns.
[26] Review for *Time and Tide* in its issue of 9 Jan 1932. In the same review she identifies the *Master Builder*, commonly read as a symbolist play, as one of her favourites.

the man (Wilfrid) she had loved but renounced in order to preserve herself. Now a business partner of Tom Leeds, for whom she worked as a publisher's reader in Part One of the novel, Bridget finds both satisfaction and a sense of purpose in her work. As she tells Margery Leeds:

> I have got a tremendous scheme on hand […] a sort of series of W.E.A. books […] What I want is to get the William Morris idea worked out: he was a far greater man than most of us realise: retrospectively in relation to history and prospectively in relation to economics […] remember Margery, publishing is a serious part of my life. (360–1)

The details of Bridget's plans for publication are significant. Her projected series of books based along the lines of those produced by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is emblematic of the political commitment that is one legacy of her relationship with Wilfrid,[27] and her wish 'to get the William Morris idea worked out' is particularly resonant. As Samuel et al. remind us, 'British Marxism […] was in the first place a "literary" movement and its most famous exponent was neither a trade unionist nor an economist but the poet-artist, William Morris' (1985: 4). Bridget's sense of Morris's significance might be seen to anticipate G. B. Shaw's reflection (in his Preface to the 1931 edition of *Fabian Essays in Socialism*) that Morris was perhaps right when he told the workers, in the 1880s, that there was no hope for them save in revolution (Kynaston 1976: 130). As Margery reveals, her husband had been rather afraid that Bridget would 'go off into Socialism'; Bridget's reply is telling: 'I shall do that, but I'm going to make Leeds & Quihampton do the work by flooding the market with really good books' (361).

Bridget's belief that Socialism can be served by book and periodical publishing ('there's [a] Weekly too', which she will edit (361)) expresses her faith in commercial print

[27] The WEA was founded in 1903 to extend education to adult members of the working class.

culture which, as Elizabeth Carolyn Miller (2013) has discussed, had become the focus of radical discontent.[28] It also provides a further context for Hamilton's statement in *Time and Tide* that 'the novelist … must write about politics'. According to Miller, a notable feature of the radical turn against the literary mass market was 'the socialist turn against the novel' (26) – a genre seen to be irredeemably 'capitalistic, individualistic, and middle-class' (91) – and a turn towards 'the drama as a more dialogic, potentially more radical literary form' (114). The popularity of Ibsen in late nineteenth-century socialist circles has already been noted, and in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* Shaw identified the theatre as a place of significant political debate (Miller 2013: 128).[29] However, as Miller points out, the private theatrical societies that staged the work of playwrights like Ibsen and Shaw targeted not large audiences but an 'elite, exclusive public' comprising an 'advanced guard of literary and political reformers' (2013: 123–7). In the years after the First World War the expansion of politically minded drama groups formed by local branches of the ILP and the Labour Party remained identified with principles of education and 'uplift', and Samuel et al. argue that it was not until the birth of the Workers' Theatre Movement in 1926 that socialist theatre in Britain shed its exclusivity in the form of a new proletarian drama focused on the class struggle (1985: 19–33). In this context, Hamilton's insistence on the political potentialities of fiction in her book reviews for *Time and Tide* is a significant rejoinder not only to Bloomsbury aesthetics, but also to socialist fellow-travellers who had turned to the theatre and abandoned the novelistic form.

Founded in May 1920 by the Welsh feminist and industrialist Lady Margaret Rhondda, *Time and Tide* was a weekly review of politics and the arts run by women and conducted along feminist lines. Its cultural criticism included a regular Theatre column (the

[28] In *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* Miller argues that the emergence of a mass print industry was seen by many socialists to be a capitalist technology against which only radical periodicals addressed to a small-scale audience (what Miller terms 'slow print') were capable of generating a political counterpublic.

[29] Miller discusses Shaw as a preeminent example of the socialist turn from the novel to drama. See Chapter 2.

paper's first theatre critic was the socialist and feminist Rebecca West) and in its first issue *Time and Tide* published a short dramatic comedy by the playwright and Fabian Society member Margaret Macnamara whose one-act plays featured in the Labour Party's 'Plays for a People's Theatre' series which began publication in the same year.[30] This playlet is one example of how *Time and Tide* drew upon socialist as well as women's suffrage networks to build up its early contributor base; it also illustrates the periodical's early orientation towards the concerns of working-class as well as middle-class women.[31] In contrast with radical papers, however, which tended to pay more attention in their review columns to theatre than to novels (Miller 2013: 94), modern fiction came to occupy an important place in *Time and Tide*'s pages, both in the short stories it published (especially by well-known and aspiring women writers) and in its regular reviews of contemporary novels. Women formed a large part of the new novel-reading public, served by an ever-increasing market for fiction, the biggest area of expansion in the publishing industry. To abandon novel-writing would be to abandon this significant audience and, arguably, to capitulate to the notion that women's literary tastes were supposedly 'debased' (Waters 1993: 27–8). *Time and Tide*'s faith in the intelligence of ordinary women readers, and in the political efficacy of print, is one of its distinguishing characteristics.[32] As such, the value it attached to the active engagement of its female audience with political as well as cultural affairs resonates strongly with Hamilton's insistence that 'the novelist … must write about politics' in her reviews.

Hamilton began writing for *Time and Tide*'s book pages in August 1920 and in the course of a decade reviewed hundreds of books from works on politics and economics

[30] For a recent discussion of this critically neglected playwright see Patricia Lufkin, 'Margaret Macnamara: a "New Woman" of the Independent Theatre Movement', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 35: 2, 2019, pp. 112–120. On the 'Plays for a People's Theatre' series see Samuel et al 1985: 24.
[31] *Time and Tide* came to identify most strongly with the interests and concerns of an expanding group of middle-class professional women.
[32] In this respect *Time and Tide* contrasts with one of its feminist predecessors, Dora Marsden's more elitist *Freewoman.*

(especially works by socialist political theorists and economists) to biography and fiction.[33] She also appears to have been one of *Time and Tide*'s early notes writers in its regular 'Review of the Week' column,[34] and she served briefly on the paper's board of directors from 1921 to 1922. Other signed contributions include a leading article in October 1921 on 'Socialism and the Labour Party' and she was almost certainly behind a series of articles on Socialism launched in the same issue.[35] In contrast with *Time and Tide'*s other leading reviewer of fiction in this period, Sylvia Lynd, who used her columns to defend (against modernist detractors) the traditional pleasures of women's leisure reading (Clay 2018: 94–7), Hamilton returns repeatedly to the politics of modern fiction and its capacity for engaging readers in social and political realities that it would be perilous to ignore. Reviewing, in October 1921, the latest novel (*Antonia*) by the English novelist and short story writer Viola Meynell, Hamilton is provoked to impatience and annoyance by the egotism of the novel's eponymous heroine: 'One longs […] to set Antonia down to earning her living; to give her something outside her own coldly self-centred emotions to think about' (14 Oct 1921: 984). In contrast, she responds enthusiastically to the work of two socially committed novelists: *Captivity* by the socialist author and journalist Leonora Eyles, and *Theodore Savage* by the veteran suffragist playwright, novelist and journalist Cicely Hamilton. At once deflecting modernist imputations of literature's contamination by politics through the 'artistic success' she attributes to these novelists, Hamilton also refutes contemporary claims about the unsuitability of the novel as a means of furthering socialism, asserting that 'each story may be

[33] Hamilton wrote fortnightly book reviews for *Time and Tide* until the end of 1926 and remained among the paper's regular reviewers on a near-monthly basis until the summer of 1931. In 1921 alone she reviewed more than one hundred books across thirty-six reviews, on one occasion reviewing as many as eight books in a single review.

[34] Margaret Rhondda reported to Elizabeth Robins in July 1920 that Mrs Hamilton was to join the paper's notes writers (unpublished correspondence, 27 July 1920). Elizabeth Robins Papers, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University Libraries.

[35] This series ran from 14 October to 25 November 1921 and included contributions from J. Ramsay MacDonald and Leonard Woolf as well as Hamilton who wrote on 'The Labour Party in Power'. In the same year Hamilton published *The Principles of Socialism with Notes for Lecturers and Class Leaders* with the ILP.

read, not only or even mainly for its interest as fiction, but as a warning; a reminder to us of some of the terrible realities among which we carelessly and blindly walk' (12 May 1922: 448–9).

Other reviews, too, evidence Hamilton's greater orientation towards politically engaged fiction than to what she described in the language of the time as 'the novel of personal relations'. Reviewing two novels in which the relationship between a man and a woman provides the central narrative focus, Hamilton writes: 'I cannot help feeling a curious sort of stuffiness, a sense of being enclosed in something small, something that hardly has the right to such intensive examination, when our very world is shaking to its foundations' (9 Feb 1923: 151). However, at the same time, and in this same review, Hamilton differentiates herself from the 'many who feel that in the world movements so vast and so shattering are going on that it is frivolous … to be probing minutely into the secrets of a single heart', stating on the contrary that 'the novel of personal relations [is] far from being played out'. With reference to the late nineteenth-century master of psychological realism, Henry James, Hamilton observes 'how fascinatingly the microcosm that is the individual soul can mirror the macrocosm that is the universe' (151) in an intimation of the value of the psychological novel to politics. Hamilton more than once chastises those who consider themselves too busy with public affairs to read novels, arguing for the seriousness of the genre. Reviewing, in June 1921, two novels and a travel book alongside three books on economics by Socialists G. D. H. Cole, William Graham and A. J. Penty, she writes:

> How much time do Mr. Cole, Mr. Graham or Mr. Penty ever spend on novels? Very little, one must hazard. Each of them would probably reply […] that they have no time; they are too busy thinking about facts to have any attention for fancies. But this false determination of facts and fancies is at the root of the whole difficulty […] every analysis of what is, every valid construction of what might be, depends on an

> understanding of how real men and women behave, what they in fact desire, how they in fact react. (10 Jun 1921: 557)

In another review Hamilton states that '[n]ovels represent […] the best available short cut to common psychology' (12 Dec 1924: 1220), and this belief in the social value of fiction further underpins her rehabilitation of the form.

There is, then, another argument running through Hamilton's book reviews, which is that the assumptions that lie behind the separation of novels as 'light' reading from 'heavy' works of non-fiction are false. In a review entitled 'Work and Business' Hamilton writes:

> There is a convention by which novels and what is called 'serious' works are sharply distinguished. They are not to be read at the same time in the day, with the same part of one's mind, nor reviewed in the same column, nor even by the same person. One reads, one should read, serious books – books about economics, politics, business, the war – in the morning, when the brain is, or is supposed to be fresh; for novels a casual quarter of an hour in the Tube, after dinner when one is drowsy, or in bed […] is good enough. […] This … convention … degrades novels and imposes on other books a quite unnecessary and unhelpful dullness. (19 Aug 1921: 793)

Hamilton's challenge to this convention provides a fascinating insight to the politics of book reviewing in light of what would soon take place in *Time and Tide*'s own review columns. On 24 November 1922 *Time and Tide*'s introduction of a new heading in its book reviews section, 'New Novels', gave greater prominence to the periodical's coverage of modern fiction in its columns. Significantly, the first novel treated under this new heading was Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, that is, in the review cited earlier by Sylvia Lynd. Succeeding Rose Macaulay (*Time and Tide*'s first book critic) Lynd had taken up a position in the paper alongside Hamilton the previous month; her first contribution was the review of Hamilton's *Follow My Leader* (also cited earlier in section one of this article). From this

point on, Lynd's fortnightly contributions were printed under the heading 'New Novels' (occasional variations such as 'Some New Plays' and 'A Short Story' also foreground the subject of imaginative literature) while Hamilton continued to review fiction and non-fiction across a range of genres in her fortnightly contributions which were printed under a variety of headings. In the absence of archival records, we can only speculate upon the kinds of conversations that took place behind the scenes of *Time and Tide*'s columns. But Hamilton's disagreement with the periodical's new editorial policy is quite clear in her review printed the following week: 'If there ever was a time when novels could be compartmented, treated separately, out of connection with books surveying life from other, more general aspects, it is not now' (1 Dec 1922: 1160). In this review, printed under the heading 'Life and Politics', Hamilton treats a novel by May Sinclair alongside two books of non-fiction (on unemployment and political Christianity), a clear demonstration of her unwillingness or refusal to separate novels from other kinds of books. In a review the following year of two volumes on political and economic subjects alongside Mollie Panter-Downes's bestselling novel *The Shoreless Sea* (1923), she writes: 'It's a far cry from the Referendum and the World's Oil Supplies to any novel […] But novels after all belong to the background of politics – indeed, to that most important section of their background which concerns the human beings whom they affect' (8 Feb 1924: 128).

For Hamilton, art and politics cannot be separated, as she states in another review from this period:

> I make no apology for putting together three pamphlets on Unemployment and two novels. When we see that the substance of fiction, and the substance of politics and economics are one and the same thing, then, and not till then, we shall have good novels, 'clean,' and above all intelligent politics, and sound economics. The human stuff after all is identical in both spheres. The man who earns his living and the man

> who makes love are one and the same, right through all superficial distinctions of classes and categories. (14 Aug 1925: 792)

Ruth Livesey has identified the 'refusal to divide aesthetics and politics' as 'one of the defining characteristics of British socialism as it gained force in the 1880s' (2004: 1), and it is this socialist understanding of the relationship between art and politics that informs Hamilton's writing for *Time and Tide*. Until the mid-1920s Hamilton continued to treat books on political and economic subjects alongside novels in her regular reviews for the periodical. From 1927 the frequency of her reviews dropped from fortnightly to monthly contributions, and the increased compartmentalization within *Time and Tide*'s expanding books section (including a weekly 'New Fiction' column) meant that while she continued to review a variety of books, she was no longer able to treat politics and fiction in the same review.[36] As I have discussed elsewhere (2018), while *Time and Tide* drew on a significant number of socialist women writers throughout the interwar years, from quite early on its interests became more closely identified with middle-class than with working-class readers, a political leaning that perhaps partially explains the omission in Hamilton's memoir of her eleven-year association with this journal. However, this should not permit us to underestimate the significance of Hamilton's socialist writing for this feminist magazine, or of her contributions to contemporary debates about modern fiction. Here, as demonstrated throughout her writing career (in fiction, journalism, biography, history and politics), Hamilton operated simultaneously in political and aesthetic spheres and insisted on the novel's capacity, too, to straddle both.

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[36] This heading replaced 'New Novels' in December 1927.

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