Friendship. By Catherine Clay. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. ix + 184 pp. $89.95 cloth.

Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars. By Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. viii + 146 pp. $45.00 cloth.

The metaphor of space is an important one for scholars of British literature and culture in the interwar period. We think of space as lived, embodied, contested. Two new books which use as their critical, historical, and theoretical framework this metaphor of space make important contributions to the study of intermodernism, a term recently coined by Kristin Bluemel to describe that conflicted "space between" the two world wars. Catherine Clay's *British Women Writers 1914-1945: Professional Work and Friendship* and Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt's *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction between the Wars* seek to map that space between. With varying degrees of success—but in generally valuable contributions—Clay and Nesbitt look at the ways women writers construct and work within space. Clay and Nesbitt show how women's bodies are positioned in space, how they create and sustain spaces for personal, professional, and political identities, and how intermodernism is characterized by a multiplicity of gendered geographies.

Work in cultural geography, particularly feminist geography, has opened up new directions in literary history. Gill Valentine and David Bell, for example, have made important contributions to the ways we understand place and space as the movement of bodies in the world; these bodies are constructed by categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality and must constantly negotiate their being in the world. Thus they create and are created by their space: space, as Michel de Certeau has theorized, is always in practice, always unstable. He writes, "Space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts." Bodies are constantly performing and enacting their space; space is constantly adjusting to contain them. Thus, space—as delineated by the dialectic between center and periphery—is always in practice political. How women construct and negotiate space is one critical focus of such theorists as Susan Stanford Friedman (and of journals like *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*). It is within this new theoretical move that we might position Clay's and Nesbit's books.

Readers particularly interested in the work of Winifred Holtby, and to a lesser extent Rebecca West, will find much to interest them in both books. Clay focuses on Holtby, Vera Brittain, Lady Rhondda/Margaret Haig Thomas, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, and Stella Benson. All of these women were significant players in the London literary scene; their network of connections, especially in

the context of their work for the feminist magazine *Time and Tide*, and the ways that network operated within the urban space of interwar London, structure Clay's book. Similarly, Nesbitt's book looks at the ways women construct and resist the space(s) that define their subjectivities, mainly in the realm of sexual and national identity. However, where Clay's work focuses mainly on the writing lives of these women and the life texts they produce, Nesbitt performs a formal study of the published narratives, fiction by Holtby and West as well as Vita Sackville-West, Angela Thirkell, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Virginia Woolf. Nesbitt's work extends the perspective created by the concerns of postcolonial theory and feminist geography to narrative practice, focusing closely on the settings of the novels she examines. With this move, she finds new applications for these paradigms, showing their flexibility, and her own creativity in the study of narrative.

British Women Writers 1914-1945 is primarily a work of collective biography. Clay argues that in the professional and erotic friendships of the interwar women writers she treats, work articulates desire (126). Beginning with the founding of *Time and Tide* by Lady Rhondda in 1920, Clay examines the formation of friendships, the intersecting connections among women writers in London and the institutions that supported—and marginalized—them, and the ways work life permitted the pursuit and performance of lesbian relationships. Like earlier studies by Shari Benstock and Bonnie Kime Scott, this book serves the purpose of expanding the critical field of modernist and interwar studies, widening the scope of inquiry and delineating the networks that allow us to see the creation and sustaining of women writers neglected by literary history.

Drawing on social network theory and cultural geography, Clay diagrams the web of friendship linking Holtby, Brittain, Lady Rhondda, Jameson, and Benson. She includes visual figures showing the friendships, companionate relationships, and rivalries these women shared, proposing to look at "these knots and breaks, slacks and tensions" which "indicate that *Time and Tide* was held together by a changing network, with due attention to this shifting pattern" (10). *Time and Tide* itself does not form the central location of the study, but instead is a site from which to begin. Nor do the places of power in literary London become central. Since Clay rejects the construction of a dominant narrative for the weaving of a more diffuse web of women's work, she provides maps of central London, southwest London, and northwest London, marked with the domiciles inhabited by her subjects, restaurants at which they met, and organizations they frequented, like The Poetry Bookshop, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Institut Français (home of the Femina Prize), and the Six Point Group. These maps make clear the paths constructed by these women and the spaces and places significant to their work.

These maps and the models of women's personal and professional connections they illustrate are the subjects of Clay's opening chapter, "Women's Friendship in Interwar Britain." The models point to some very interesting potential directions, especially given Clay's focus on *Time and Tide* and her contention that the

interwar period saw the rise of women's professional writing, resulting in a shifting and questioning of categories like "highbrow," "middlebrow," "lowbrow," and a troubling of the divide between high/modernist culture and low/popular culture. However, the framework established by these models in the opening chapter is not sustained throughout the rest of the book. Clay seems to abandon the paradigm of social networks and the ways they are made present in cultural, professional, and geographical space, and instead provides biographies of friendships, all of which seek to uncover the erotic underpinnings of women's professional lives and relationships. Clay applies Laura Doan's idea of the "apparitional lesbian" and her work on the creation of lesbian culture, linking it to interwar women's working lives and thus extending the notion of lesbian performance in modernity. Drawing on previously unpublished letters and diaries and performing close readings of these texts, Clay uncovers and reclaims the lesbian nature of these alliances, showing how women used work to further erotic relationships, particularly where the desire of one of the parties could not be articulated.

For instance, in her examination of the letters of Lady Rhondda and Holtby, Clay considers business correspondence vital to the women's work at *Time and Tide*, especially once Holtby was made a Director. She highlights letters in which the women note the necessity of "going feminine," playing the girl in order to get along with their male co-workers (63). (Men formed an increasing number of staff members at the magazine in the years after its founding, a significant development Clay passes over.) Clay reads these textual moments as highly performative, with the women constructing a specifically gendered identity for their work life in and out of the office. Yet Lady Rhondda and Holtby exchanged more than business correspondence. During a trip to the Mediterranean, Lady Rhondda wrote numerous letters to Holtby characterized by what Clay calls the "Sapphic imaginary," the "unrepresentability" of erotic lesbian desire that can only be articulated through the formation of a work relationship: the "romance of business" (68-69).

It may very well be true that upon Lady Rhondda's return from this trip, her presentation of a slip of maidenhair to Holtby was "an overt expression of lesbian eroticism" (68). It may very well be, too, that part of what destroyed the friendship between Storm Jameson and Vera Brittain was the silencing of Jameson's lesbian desire, the disappearing act forced on the former by the latter in the refusal to acknowledge the erotic nature of their friendship. However, one cannot help but feel that the women in this book might have been better served by a fuller articulation of the work lives hinted at in the opening chapter. The intersection of the personal and professional is of course significant, but the reader is left with numerous unanswered questions. For instance, what are the implications of the constant references to the publishing of *Time and Tide* in terms of birth, especially as the women involved married and had children of their own, often problematizing their friendships with other women in the process? What role did the office life of *Time and Tide* or other work environments play in their lives? While attention is given to the Holtby/Rhondda business correspondence, for the most part these women

are *not* seen in their work spaces. Why not? And might the tensions between the spaces of home life, love life, and work life be more closely examined? The case studies provided do not quite do the job of exploring the connections suggested by the web at the opening, leaving the fundamental question about the significance of these connections unanswered. The maps provided at the beginning of the book hint at a deeper and broader investigation here, one that is yet to be done.

Clay's work explores the friction between the personal and the professional in women's lives. The personal, in Nesbitt's *Narrative Settlements* is a site where women's ideological identities are called into question through the domestic codes they seem to embody. These are not bodies moving through the spaces of the city or the office, but bodies regulated by strictly defined ideological spaces of sexuality and empire. Undertaking the formal analysis of setting using a postcolonial feminist lens, Nesbitt argues that women writers between the wars use the novel to reify imperial ideology. Women's sense of this ideology, the ways they themselves embody and perform that ideology, and the ways they subvert their own position within their imagined community form a crucial part of many interwar writers' agendas. The authors Nesbitt examines make valuable interventions into the anxieties over identity, homeland, and power that characterized that period, and her work goes far to link those anxieties to narrative theory and practice.

Using "settings that have a synecdochal relationship to England"—London, the country house, the imperial landscape, and the provinces—Nesbitt argues that "women's writing explores the ways that new opportunities for women might undermine or alter concepts of national security reliant on gendered concepts of the private and public spheres" (4). The concept of the imagined community, taken from Benedict Anderson, allows Nesbitt to theorize national identity as an invented space; here, the invented spaces she looks at in the fiction under study represent England writ small, thus functioning as sites for intervention into the construction (and questioning) of national and imperial identity. Women's writing is especially significant here, as the gendered body is a particular problem in the reading and writing of such spaces. The embodied subject must negotiate a spatial arrangement embedded in ideological structures; how that subject represents the body in the world through narrative forms an important part of Nesbitt's work.

This book draws heavily, too, on the theories of de Certeau, especially in the first chapter, a consideration of the woman walker in the city. Here, Nesbitt focuses on Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Rebecca West's *Harriet Hume*, contrasting the two by arguing that while the figure of Clarissa Dalloway maintains the symbiotic relationship between women's civic and domestic duties, West's book questions the place of women's private lives and whether they should play a role in public life and the defining of national identity. By positioning London as the center of political power, and women's spaces within that center as reifying "the political uses of domesticity as a core of national strength" (27), Nesbitt offers a critique, on the one hand, of Clarissa Dalloway as embodying the private self as public servant. On the other hand, West's Harriet is seen finally as retreating into

the private sphere as a way of rejecting the use of the gendered body as a site upon which to construct a chauvinist definition of national identity. Unfortunately, Woolf functions as something of a straw (wo)man in the chapter; it is easy to offer this critique of *Mrs. Dalloway* (or of Clarissa Dalloway specifically), but those who might be familiar with recent work on the complicated intersections between public and private life in Woolf's texts (Naomi Black's *Virginia Woolf as Feminist* or Melba Cuddy-Keane's *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*) might look for a more complicated accounting of this novel. Further, one cannot help but recall *Three Guineas*, Woolf's own articulation of the relationship between private and political selves, and wish for more contextualization here.

The next chapter focuses on the country house, beginning with a review of Raymond Williams's seminal work on the subject, and moving to an analysis of Woolf's *Orlando* and Vita Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*. The idea of the country house as "a miniature vision of England" is not a new one; yet Nesbitt takes this in a fruitful direction by looking at the ways the nostalgia and conventionality of the country house world are connected to heterosexuality, "the basis for the maintenance of the country house tradition" (47). The disruption of desire and domesticity in the novels under study functions to call into question the economy of identity in interwar Britain. (One novelist whose inclusion might have added much to Nesbitt's analysis is Ivy Compton-Burnett, whose investigations of disruptive sexuality in domestic settings, such as *A House and Its Head*, serve as a chilling indictment of the ideology of the country house.) The connections among desire, identity, and power are further interrogated through Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* and Winifred Holtby's *Mandoa, Mandoa*, Nesbitt's analysis of which looks specifically at the imperial economy and its relationship to masculinity. As same-sex desire disrupts the world of the country house in Chapter Two, so it does in Nesbitt's study of the imperial imaginary in Chapter Three. Here, the potentially disorderly homosexual body must be removed from the center as "models of same-sex domesticity. . . threaten to contaminate a domestic 'hereness' indigenous to England" (63). Ultimately, these models are overthrown by a return to the "mother country" and an embracing of family, property, and nation.

In her final chapter, Nesbitt turns to the provinces as narrativized in regionalist novels, focusing on Holtby's *South Riding* and Angela Thirkell's Barsetshire novels. The English provinces provide a vision of the nation in miniature, "what England was, is, and might be" (82). This chapter serves to illustrate competing visions of the condition of England in the interwar period, a divergence about ideas of where the nation should be headed. This time and the women writing in it were ambivalent about their place in the nation and their own resistance against and complicity in its categories. Nesbitt effectively demonstrates interwar anxieties surrounding the nature of community and the roles women played in imagining, reimagining, and transforming community. The regions, the provinces, have been envisioned as the heart of England; these texts and their questions cut to that very heart.

Indeed, readers will find much to grapple with in these texts. While Clay's and Nesbitt's books each raise issues surrounding the networks and complications of women's private and public lives that are never fully resolved, they serve to create space for future investigation.

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