White Imagery: Exploring the Influence of the Mother Figure in May Sinclair's *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*

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Introduction

May Sinclair (1863-1946) was not only one of the most prominent female writers of her time, with many roles, such as literary critic, poet, and philosopher, but involved in different fields beyond the literature. She founded a psychoanalytic clinic, worked as a member of the field ambulance worker during the First World War, and participated women's suffrage movement; she responded to major movements in many areas of society. Despite her active engagements with a number of social problems that are well reflected in her fictions which should not be neglected in literary landscape, most of her works has been remarkably underrated in recent years.

Suzanne Raitt, Sinclair's most recent biographer, points out that Sinclair's childhood remained under the dominant power of her mother, Amelia Sinclair who was rigid and openly favoured her sons (19). Sinclair struggled to "act like the demure and obedient shadow-self her mother [Amelia Sinclair] wanted her [May Sinclair] to be" (19). While the discord easily separated their relationships, after her brothers passed away and left her behind, she was forced to practically nurse her mother by herself. Although Sinclair was known for dismissing autobiographical work as the product of a "self-promoter" (Jones), *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922) (hereafter referred to as *Harriett*) contains many images of the submissive daughter from the childhood of the author, including "the dark version of Sinclair's own life" (Raitt 243). Some scholars suggest that *Harriett* depicts Victorian parents in the UK who repressed Harriett's ability to develop and shaped her into a submissive woman (Boll 273, Zegger 119, 123).

Her answer to Willis Steell in an interview emphasises the dark tone of the story; she comments that "I wished to see what I could make out of the study of a small, arrogant creature, not selfish entirely, and not wilfully cruel, but incredibly blind and with a wizened soul" (559). *Harriett* is a short story that follows the life of the protagonist Harriett, a depressed, poignant, unmarried woman educated by mid-Victorian parents. The story particularly reflects the domestic space in a Victorian society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her parents direct their love to Harriett, and do not question decisions she has made. She wants to behave beautifully to live up to their expectations. Even when Harriett grows old and approaches her death, she is still restrained by the parents' values.

In "Dolls and Dead Babies: Victorian Motherhood in May Sinclair's *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*", Charlotte Beyer has already pointed out the importance of "the mother-daughter relationship" in *Harriett* (225), emphasising that *Harriett* embraces the "Victorian idealisation of motherhood" (225).

María Francisca Llantada Díaz refers to Imagist techniques in *Harriett*, which use in poetic language to depict "moments of agonizing anguish" in the protagonist's mind (39). For instance, Llantada points out "Harriett's sterility and impending death" in the colour white, which can be seen in the closing chapter of the novel, where the protagonist has an operation to remove the same tumour as her mother (35).

Given the points mentioned above, the aim of this paper is to further explore the significance of white imagery throughout the novel. Indeed, it functions in multiple ways such as idolising Harriett's mother and emphasising the relationship between Harriett and her mother. This approach provides crucial insights into Sinclair's unique portrayal of unmarried women in the period. This study also explores how "the mother-daughter relationship" is associated with white imagery after maternal loss in *Harriett* (225), and how it significantly influences Harriett's psychological state.

The first chapter will explore how Harriett's repressed character is described throughout her life and how the house prevents her from developing her independence. The second chapter will focus on the symbolic use of whiteness in female characters in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) (hereafter referred to as *Tess*) and then consider how Maggie, a servant who works in Harriett's house, plays a role in helping the aged Harriett. Lastly, the third chapter will examine the last chapter of the novel, in which hallucinations of complex imagery revolve around Harriett's consciousness, with a particular focus on a white figure that appears in her premortal. Through these chapters, the paper will attempt to illustrate how skilfully Sinclair reflects major themes in small details such as imagery and attempt to reassess her as a great novelist.

CHAPTER 1: Ideal Woman in Victorian Society

1.1. Harriett's Repressed Character as a Victorian Woman

Harriett begins in Harriett's childhood when she listens and reacts joyfully to her mother's singing of the nursery rhyme *Pussycat, Pussycat.* The story can be roughly divided into three parts; childhood, adulthood, and old-age, and in each part, her idea of behaving beautifully like her parents has remained virtually unchanged. Raitt notes a side of "psychoanalytic paradigms" inside the story (254), and Harriett's deteriorating life contains "the dangers of a failure to sublimate and to escape from somatic and emotional traps laid by one's parents" (255). This chapter will briefly discuss the narrative method used in the novel and explore the causes of Harriett's repressed status as a Victorian woman through an examination of her limited relationships.

As mentioned in the Introduction that Harriett's obedience is constructed by her intellectual and dedicated parents, especially her mother, which sets up an unescapable circumstance that blocks the daughter's emotional development. When Harriett was a little child, Harriett admires her mother and tells her that she hopes to have a daughter someday: "I think—perhaps I'd rather have a little girl" (Sinclair 4). Harriett will never meet her daughter, but this choice represents vividly her innocence and dependence on her mother. The following passage, "she would be like Mamma, and her little girl would be like herself. She couldn't think of it any other way" (4), this passage emphasises how her mother's influence is far too dominant in her life and connects Harriett's consciousness directly and openly with the reader.

Sinclair also allows the reader to share Harriett's thoughts, creating a direct connection between her inner world and theirs. Sinclair is the first person to use the term stream of consciousness as a narrative style when she commented on a Dorothy Richardson's novel *Pilgrimage*. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, James Joyce's *Ulysses* are both famous English novels using this technique. It helps the reader to understand the protagonist's shifting psychological state. Hrisey D. Zegger cited Sinclair's comment for *Harriett* "an experiment… in the welding of the stream of consciousness to more traditional techniques" (124), and points out that she "regarded it more simply as a means of gaining greater immediacy and vividness in depicting a character" (Zegger 126). In this way, that experiment further succeeds in reinforcing her attachment for the parents through her life.

In the novel, Harriett's sensitive character and hypocritical *good behaviour* can be seen in several relationships with her friend. Harriett made many friends during her childhood, Connie, Lizzie, Sarah, and Priscilla, and she will never make any friends except for them throughout her life. This suggests that Harriett remains tied to her past, depicting an immature side of Harriett. She also thinks that they are an obstacle to destroying the relationship between her and her parents: "When they were there they broke something… secret and precious between her and her father and her mother" (Sinclair 16). Her behaviour serves as an illustration of her moral beauty which is superior to that of the other friends. The ideal she constructs from her parents ultimately engenders both arrogance and discord with her friends, demonstrating how such unrealistic standards prove destructive to the relationships. When Harriett refuses the opportunity to marry Robin, Priscilla's fiancé, because she thinks she should behave *good* and not betray her best friend Priscilla, "only with her father and mother she had peace" (21), they do not blame her but justify her decision because "…you've done the right thing" (21). The remark that accepts Harriett's decision kindly, suggests their substance, which cuts off her independence.

In *The Daughters of England* (1842)*,* a conduct book on moral education for the middle-class women in 19th century, Sarah Ellis points out the negative influences of going out into society, as "society soon taught them [young women] that the views of their parents were unenlightened, old-fashioned, or absurd…" (Ellis 219), suggesting that some Victorian mothers might have feared that their daughters would change and break the conventional value that they had long observed. Conversely, this suggests that they wanted to keep their daughter *within their sight*. Because "she had a horror … of change" (Sinclair 37), the community and society to which Harriett belonged before her death consisted largely of her parents, friends, and a few servants. She behaves as *an ideal daughter* and an impeccable image for her mother and the old-fashioned Victorian model.

1.2. Influence of Family and House

In the middle of the story, the depiction of Harriett's mother makes the protagonist realises that the absence of a maternal figure evokes a sense of emptiness, as if an "essential part of herself had gone" in her mind (Sinclair 37). Sinclair's description of the setting, in which the female protagonist struggles with "the horror of emptiness" she has never experienced (37), in an enclosed space such as a house, visually and symbolically highlights Harriett's shifting consciousness which emphasises opportunities for independence and growth without protector, her parents. The loss of her mother gives Harriett, for the first time, an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of her own existence and to assess the influence of her parents on her.

Harriett's father, Hilton Frean, is portrayed as an attractive and capable man for Harriett. The description of him explains that she admires his appearance, and her gaze towards him may contain more than respect: "she loved his straight, slender face…" (Sinclair 13). She arrogantly and proudly boasts to those around her that her father is Hilton Frean, not her own reputation. When Harriett talks to Mona, Robin's niece, she regards him as "the best and wisest man" (48). Therefore, through her words and consciousness, they suggest that the father-daughter relationship possesses a certain level of intimacy. Despite this, Harriett was not as shocked by the loss of her father as she had been to her mother died. It is because of "what he [Harriett's father] had absorbed was given back to her, transferred to her mother" (37). Instead, her mother has left an indelible maternity on Harriett's consciousness; "all her [Harriett] memories of her mother were joined to the memory of this now irrecoverable self" (37). Furthermore, the structure of the story suggests that Sinclair deliberately writes paternal death as an unworthy subject for her. While she devotes chapter 8 and 9 to describing death of Harriett's mother and its effect on Harriett's own development, her father's ruin, ageing and even his death is abruptly summarised in chapter 7: "And, suddenly, he began to sink…" (29). What's more, his death is not contemplated in depth in the subsequent chapter, which begins with a reflection on her mother's secret: "Her mother had some secret that she couldn't share" (32). The chapter division and the uncomplicated depiction of the death of Harriett's father helps the reader to realise that, as Beyer notes, the novel revolves around "Harriet's complex relationship with her mother", not the relationship with her father (Beyer 225).

As previously mentioned, the house setting represents a unique place in Harriett's shifting psychological state. A house means "a building for human habitation, typically and historically one that is the usual place of residence of a family" (Oxford English Dictionary def. N.1). In what should be a *family* house, Harriett rarely remembers her father, but often remembers her mother. After the loss of her parents, when she reads a book containing her mother's favourite passage, she understands that "⋯ what she [Harriett] loved was the dark-green book she had seen in her mother's long, white hands, and the sound of her mother's voice reading" and not a mother's favoured passage (37). Even though her friend tried to take her out of the house, she chose to stay home because of her fear of change: "she loved the rooms that had held her mother⋯ the white, fluted cup she had drunk from the illness" (37). These suggest to the reader that the mother's memory deepens her, and white objects in her thought exposes grotesquely idolised motherhood. For her, however, meeting with her friend to distract her emptiness arouses a feeling she has never felt before: In the description "the sweet peas she had planted had come up" (38), the flowers symbolically depict a development of her own individuality. The flowering directly demonstrates positive future and a new beginning to her life, after which "the house and garden were hers" (38).

However, the setting of the house returns in a later chapter as a refuge for the aged Harriett. When she tends to stay at home with her servant, Maggie. Harriett expresses her affection for "the house and Maggie, Maggie and the house" where she feels her existence and indeed a "protective shell" for her (57). Leslie de Bont claims that, however, "Sinclairian domestic spaces are very rarely protective shells" (de Bont 193), Sinclair expresses the protective space in *Harriett* that is parallel to Maggie. This indicates the significance of the house as represented in *Harriett*. It can suggest that, like Maggie, the house is maintained as a safe place for Harriett and preserves distance from the passing outside world, Maggie reminds her of the past "⋯ as she had clung and submitted to her mother" (Sinclair 57). For Harriett, the house is therefore inextricably linked to the mother figure, and it functions as a domestic space in which her psychological instability as a result of the loss of her maternal figure or ageing exposes underlying dependencies on both the house and her mother.

CHAPTER 2: Surrogate Mother Figure for Harriett

2.1. White Symbols in Literature

It can be argued that colour symbolism represents a key literary device to enhance the emotional depth and visual imagery of the character. The colour white often serves as a significant symbolic representation of *ideal* elements of female characters such as purity, innocence, and virtue. Some popular English literature portray women who lived under social norms between the 19th and the early 20th centuries, and white symbols in well-known novels are used in such as Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Mansfield Park* (1814), Thomas Hardy's *Tess*. In these novels, the whiteness of the female characters' clothing is mainly used to highlight their inner purity and virtue as "white⋯ had been associated with chastity" (Boyle). Similarly, bright colours were considered a "lack of virtue" and Roman women traditionally dressed in white (Conroy 41). In order to create an ideal, patriarchal society, The Victorian era celebrated the idealised beauty of women as *the Angel in the House*, a phrase from a poem by Coventry Patmore, which offers a guidance on how women should behave as idealised female figures in domestic spaces. These ideas were highly valued in an accordance with a male dominance which expected women to perform in household duties, devote themselves to their husbands and practise self-sacrifice in the domestic spaces. As society confined women to submissive roles, they needed a space where they could be *themselves*, and as Tosh notes "the home was the first and most essential sphere for a woman's angelic mission" (Tosh 55).

What is more, social acceptance legitimised the idea of strong male dominance and the subordination of women, maintaining the image for over a century. Focusing on this dominant figure, Nishimura analyses the use of the colour white in Thomas Hardy's *Tess*, which clearly symbolises purity; through Alec's violation of white-muslin Tess's purity, "the cruelty of male violence against woman characters illustrates 'separate spheres' in Victorian society vividly" (Nishimura 262-263). Due to its sexual description, *Tess* was criticised during Hardy's lifetime for questioning Victorian sexual morality, while the plot effectively portrays the tragic fate of its heroine. Additionally, Raitt writes that Hardy was one of the eminent writers who seems to have had a close relationship with Sinclair (113), and Sinclair was also glad to get "his [Hardy] respect and liking" (114). Sinclair celebrated the success of *Tess* at the Royal Opera House and emphasised that she had evaluated the psychological aspect in *Tess*[1]. Zegger points out that Hardy's characteristic "antithesis" inspired the protagonist Gwenda in Sinclair's *The Three Sisters* (1914), "who is an aspiring character with aesthetic and moral sensitivity, tries to resist nature and is defeated" (Zegger 66), and this composition is very similar to Harriett who cannot escape the inner restrictions of her parents.

The point is that the two protagonists in the different novels by Sinclair, Harriett and Gwenda, cannot change their circumstances independently, such as the nature for Gwenda, the house and the surroundings around Harriett, describing the weakness against their given circumstances. Although Gwenda seems to surpass Harriett by actively pursuing change, ultimately, neither can change their situation. It is reminiscent of the Victorian woman's parents, as previously mentioned, who do not want to expose their daughters to the *real* society. However, the unchanging circumstances that Harriett's parents provided in turn makes opportunities for their daughter to depend easily on them. The female protagonists in both novels are oppressed by forces unreasonable power, which strongly reflects the situation of women in the Victorian period.

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[1] Sinclair to Hardy, 21 July 1909, "*Letter from May Sinclair to Thomas Hardy, 21 July 1909.*", Hardy's Correspondents, https://hardycorrespondents.exeter.ac.uk/text.html?id=dhe-hl-h.5225. Accessed Sat 11 Jan. 2025.

2.2. Surrogate Mother for Harriett

By emphasising the whiteness associated with ageing, Harriett acquires confidence in her new servant, Maggie who embodies for Harriett a different motherhood in place of her dead mother. Harriett "loved the comfort and protection of Maggie…" (55). Moreover, when "Maggie unbutton her black gown" (46) and "put out her white, rose-pointed breast to still his cry" (46), Maggie's white breast and black gown intimidate old Harriett in the text's simple yet vivid representation. It becomes clear that the scene clearly reveals the baby has what Harriett was denied after her mother's death; youth and a mother's love. Harriett's annoyance turns into hostility towards the baby, as her fear of being separated by her *surrogate mother* makes the baby's presence in her home unbearable: "Harriett couldn't bear it. She could not bear it" (46). The uncontracted form in the second phrase further stresses a Harriett's rejection of the baby. This phrasing more clearly mirrors, as an unmarried woman, Harriett's denial of the alienating presence, such as the baby.

The baby boy seems to control and win his mother's affection by capturing her attention for himself, by surrogate mother, Maggie. The situation in which Harriett fails to capture the attention of her, and instead the baby boy who nurses from Maggie can be seen as representing vividly the crucial point in Freud Sigmund's *On the Sexual Theories of Children* (1908) that "the neglect of the differences between the sexes" (11). As an unmarried woman, her attitude shows that she displays envy toward the male infant.

Freud claims that a woman's clitoris is "homologous to the penis" (Freud 13), and it is not the case that function as a substitute for "real and genuine penis" during the childhood (13). Yet, women should show interests in boy's penis, and without it, the interest ultimately turns into envy against male genitalia because "they feel themselves unfairly treated" (14). Therefore, the penis envy relationship portrayed in the house profoundly shows how both Harriett and the baby receive care from their *mother* Maggie in the same house.

As I noted above, there is *penis envy* in his sexual theories. His psychoanalytic theory provided a sophisticated view of the primal desires and the repression of these urges within the unconsciousness of human. As one of the pioneer thinkers of the period, Freud's ideology significantly influenced Sinclair in areas of psychoanalysis after she had participated in the Medico-Psychological Clinic in 1913. Although Raitt writes that "Sinclair objected to the sexual emphases of much psychoanalytic theory" (247), she points to the depiction in the novel as "the first time she [Sinclair] experimented with developing her own sexual imagery", such as the red campion in the lane that Harriett's mother forbids her to enter (247). In addition to Raitt's point about the symbolic use of campion, Harriett's fear or envy of the baby boy recalls Freudian sexual theory. It may be argued that *Harriett* challenges to depict the daughter's positioning as an unmarried woman, longing for maternity and hiding from metaphorical threat and envy of the phallus, is her predetermined psychological state by her parents.

Notably, Maggie, as a surrogate mother figure, wears a white apron and cap upon leaving Harriett's home, further supporting this view point. This underlines the extensive representations of mother figures, not biological but psychological, who are associated with Harriett and the mother figure. These feminine symbols, such as the servant's breast and apron, offer the potential of breastfeeding. At the beginning of the story, there is no depiction of Harriett engaging in typical baby behaviour, such as crying for her mother or nursing at her mother's breast. The lack of such phase, which behaves as a needy and greedy baby to seek her mother's breasts, tends to prevent Harriett from developing into an independent woman, and rather reveals the closed images of Harriett.

Similarly, what Maggie tells Harriett about her high demand as a servant in other houses reflects how lower-class woman in the social hierarchy were deemed the weaker sex and submitted to masculinity. This reflects the concept of *the Angel in the House* as I noted earlier. Her dedication to the care of "old ladies and children. And gentlemen, if they're ill enough" suits to the domestic ideals in which they should behave for their roles during that period (Sinclair 55); hence she was praised by Harriett as a "good girl" (55).

Maggie continues to care for the aged Harriett. As indicated in the latter part of the story, Harriett "no longer enjoyed visiting her friends" (57), shows how aged Harriet becomes increasingly housebound, and keeps living in the past when she lived with her mother. She "saw Maggie coming in… she thought of her mother" (58). But, Maggie once, "in her large white apron", has to care for her own parents and then she leaves Harriet's house (59). Harriet experiences a separation from maternal figures twice, first from her own mother, and then from Maggie, her surrogate mother. The imagery of the white apron emphasises that when Maggie returns to her own parents, she cannot become a substitute for Harriett's mother.

CHAPTER 3: The White Imagery at the Moment of Death

3.1. The Transcendence of Harriett's Mother

The last chapter of the novel is a turning point in *Harriett*, and touches on the reason why it is considered as one of Sinclair's masterpieces. The discovery of Harriett's inheritance of her mother's condition evokes "a strange, solemn excitement and exaltation" (Sinclair 60), leading to her confession to Lizzie that "she had what her mother had" (60). Described as "'something malignant'" when doctor determines the illness of Harriett's mother (34), the diagnose underscores the undefined burden shared between Harriett and her mother, highlighting their entangled bond rather than a mere physical symptom.

Ironically, every stab of pain from the unnamed illness steadily deepens Harriett's distress at the thought "she would live again in her mother" (60). The preposition *in* in this phrase underlies her longing for "mother's approval" (Boll 274), despite the death of her mother, still hinders the daughter from achieving her mental growth, and binds her to the past. Upon taking an operation, Harriett fears the idea of having a step her mother never had, and being exposed to the gaze of others. These sudden shifts demonstrate a break from "the Victorian idealisation of motherhood" (Beyer 224). Harriett approaches the operating table, described as "a dramatic event" (Llantada 38), and this signifies Harriett's resistance to her mother. Furthermore, the scene in which she displays stately "her dignity" in public shows Harriett's growth (Llantada 10).

Harriett's sudden resonance with her mother may be seen as a release from her image, but it may also be associated with the development of imaginary labour pains that lead to her pregnancy. The image of the resonance with her mother leads to Harriett's desire to return to the past when she did not suffer from ageing. Harriett's ecstasy over the development of her tumour can be aligned with Carl G. Jung's concept for "the 'incestuous' desire" (282) based on a symbolic "idea of becoming a child again, of returning to the parental shelter, and of entering into the mother in order to be reborn through her" (282). Harriett's ecstatic pain brings her back to her mother. For Harriett, merging with her mother leads to equating herself with her mother, which also leads to acquiring the youth that Maggie's baby boy possesses.

Throughout the story, Sinclair presents Harriett's mother as an epitome of the motherhood, a Victorian ideal that could support her family. When Harriett's mother refuses to have the operation due to its cost, she claims, "They [Doctor] think; they think. But I know. I know better than all the doctors" (Sinclair 34). There appears to be a self-righteous and omnipotent aspect to the mother, evoking a maternal myth that "mothers are all-powering, all-knowing, and all-loving, all the time" according to Barnett (2006: 425). The moral beauty of the woman, which leads to maternal behaviour, reinforces the shaping consciousness of Victorian children, and surely this tendency can be seen in Harriett's childhood, too. Surprisingly, for Harriett, her mother's ideal extended beyond the personal relationship of the mother and the daughter; in her childhood, her mother was even more sublime than God and Jesus (Sinclair 5). It is implied that her mother has almost transcendental power over her, which is essential to her placement alongside the divine being. After the appearance of her servant Maggie in the latter chapter, who stands for Harriett's mother in the house, Harriett becomes temporarily dependent on surrogate maternal bonds. However, the psychological connection and the same illness create a stronger bond with the biological mother, rather than with Maggie.

3.2. The Identity of the White Figure

After the operation, Harriett can hardly recall her memories accurately, in a disorientated state, as several vivid hallucinations cause confusion to her. She mistakes a doctor for Mr Hancock, who lost his asset because of Harriett's father, hears a nursery song her mother used to sing to her. On her deathbed, Harriett believes that she is to blame for the death of Maggie's baby; "… she's crying because she thinks I killed her baby" (Sinclair 61), under the hallucination, she was obsessed with her inner suffering against the infants. This is the moment when Harriett realises for the first time that she is not independent enough from her parents' influence. Various white imageries emerge simultaneously: after "a figure in white, with a stiff white cap stood by the bed…" (61), appears then "the white curtain walls of the cubicle contracted, closed in on her" (61); she is lying in "her white-curtained nursery cot" (61), and weakens like a child. Harriett's life ends with calling ecstatically and dreamily her married friend Connie Pennefather as "Mamma——" (62). The climatic moment represents precisely Harriett's longing for her mother with the Imagist techniques.

One of the various white imageries in the scene occurs when Harriett realises the white figure stands beside Harriett and says sadly to her, "It's sad – to go through so much pain and then to have a dead baby" (61). Since Sinclair was into Imagism trend which was "one of the literary currents of the era" (Zegger 26), she was "fascinated by the idea of an image which made no reference beyond itself" (Raitt 206). Therefore, it follows that her novels rarely relate to symbolism. She might have intended these white imageries to highlight characters nothing more than what they portray. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Llantada claims that the white imagery in the closing part of Harriett is represented as "Harriett's sterility and impending death" (35), reinforcing negative image caused by the operation..

These imageries such as white figures, white shrinking curtain and white curtained nursery cot are mostly caused in the Harriett's hallucination near her death. The appearance of Connie Pennefather makes her "[smile] with a sudden ecstatic wonder and recognition" (62). The presence of Harriett's mother is important to Harriett. She does not choose to leave the motherhood of her own mother or change her circumstances. This tendency worsens for some time after the separation from her mother, and most of the white imageries act as crucial representations linking them altogether. As I noted earlier, Maggie's white breast can be associated with the Freudian penis envy theory, and after the loss of her mother, memories of her mother such as her white hands and the cup she used, even more strongly persist in Harriett. Furthermore, the image of the disappearance of maternal figures is indicated in the episode of Maggie's leaving Harriett's house.

The white imagery, which has become the colour of separation from maternal figures because of Maggie, brings about a new maternal figure, symbolised by the tumour. The series of symbols introduced by the tumour, such as the white uniformed nurse and the white hospital bed, provide her with comfort through a new maternal presence. What Harriett saw on her deathbed at last was not her mother but Connie, but Harriett's expression of "sudden ecstatic wonder and recognition" (62) suggests that she did ultimately feel a sense of maternal presence from Connie.

Lastly, I would like to mention Sinclair's personal experience that is reflected in the description of the white nurse in *Harriett*. *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915) (hereafter referred to as *Journal*) records her experience in Belgium; in 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, at the age of 51, Sinclair volunteered for 17 days on the Western Front in Belgium. She could not become a nurse because of her age, and then she was told that she had played a role as a secretary and reporter which she was not well trained for. She writes how sophisticated trained nurses are on the Front, wearing white uniforms. The whiteness of their clothing is further emphasised with the adjective "angelic" which appears frequently to praise their refined nursing care and kindness (Sinclair *Journal* 37), evoking the imagery of *white angels* at the Front. Despite her role as a reporter, she shows the self-sacrifice of a trained nurse. For example, she objected to Commandment's suggestion that she records bombardment: "… if I could nurse the wounded I would face any bombardment you please to name" (Sinclair *Journal* 20).

As Thrall points out that the *Journal* depicts Sinclair's active force of her "'willing'" through the recovery of wounded soldiers' condition due to her prayers (Thrall 141), he also argues that "her references to prayer suggest willing in cooperation with… supernatural force…" (142). This experience is similar to the representation of the nurse in the closing part of *Harriett*. Their roles are exactly opposite but their representation appears to be both supernatural and the nurse's role in life and death of patients. I suggest that some portrayal in *Harriett* may have reflected on her own past experiences in creating the nurse's imagery.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the question of how the imagery of white is used in the depictions of mother and daughter relationship in May Sinclair's *Life and Death of Harriett*. Sinclair presents Harriett as an unmarried woman who becomes "blind and with a wizened soul" (Steell 559), suggesting the future of women victimised by Victorian enforced ideals. As Beyer mentions, "Sinclair herself knew the extent to which Victorian values and ideas continued to influence social and cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood period" (246). Various white imageries in the novel appear in Harriett's consciousness as she grows older, even after her mother's death, and show us the grotesqueness of the idealised image of virtue and innocence. The closing chapter of the novel most eloquently shows this.

As mentioned in this paper, maternal influence manifests through white symbols: Harriett's mother's cup and her hands, Maggie's apron, hallucination and a nurse's uniform. The white objects and garments work as visual representation of her mother's presence, revealing how her awareness of her mother affects her life. Even allowing for Sinclair's secretive tendency to express herself, the novel's emphasis on Harriett's longing for motherhood openly illustrates the image of the mother figure shaped in the late Victorian period. The novel also demonstrates the importance of imagery in allowing the reader to explore the changing psychological aspects of the protagonist through stream of consciousness. *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* is, therefore, a sophisticated novel, because it combines the psychological portrait of a character overshadowed by the dominant image of her mother with the effective use of colour imagery.

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