

SPECIAL ISSUE

Journal of World-Systems Research

# FESTSCHRIFT FOR IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN PART I

PUBLISHED UNDER THE SPONSORSHIP OF THE  
CENTER FOR GLOBAL, INTERNATIONAL &  
REGIONAL STUDIES AND THE DIVISION OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ



VOLUME XI, NUMBER 2, SUMMER/FALL 2000

<http://jwsr.ucr.edu/>

## FLIGHT TO THE CENTRE: WINNIE GONLEY, 1930S COLONIAL COSMOPOLITAN

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Winnie Gonley (1909-1995), my mother, was an Irish New Zealander who at the age of 28, in 1937, left friends and family for Europe. She stayed there the rest of her life but never changed her New Zealand passport for a British one. She was a feminist who for nearly sixty years put her man first; a writer who published almost nothing; a Bohemian for whom Paris was eldorado but who spent most of her life as an academic wife in Oxford; a free spirit who brought up three daughters in an apparently conventional household; a well-educated and hard-working woman of great independence whose employment never remotely matched her abilities. And she was a woman who lived a rich and generous life.

As I read the papers she left—mainly poems and correspondence—and cross-check them against family memories and stories, old photographs, and the biography by Keith Ovenden of my father, Dan Davin,<sup>1</sup> I wonder who she was before I knew her? What cultural influences and experiences were significant? How was she affected by the relationships and events I read about? How did she feel about the gaps between her original ambitions and the course her life took? Behind these questions, and in whatever answers to them I may eventually be able to develop, lie global cultural interactions, across generations, across class and gender, across a life-span, across the world. In this paper I focus on her as a cultural migrant, coming from what

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JOURNAL OF WORLD-SYSTEMS RESEARCH, VI, 2, SUMMER/FALL 2000, 286-306

Special Issue: Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein – Part I

<http://jwsr.ucr.edu>

ISSN 1076-156X

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she and her friends felt to be the other side of the world to Paris, the centre of modern culture. I will look first at the ways in which her own cultural identity was shaped, through family, education and life events, then at her experiences in moving to prewar Europe.

#### IRISH IN NEW ZEALAND

Winnie was born in 1909 in a small country-town in the extreme south of New Zealand (latitude 46), where Antarctic winds bring bitter winter cold. She belonged to an Irish and Catholic community which her Galway grandparents had helped to establish, although New Zealand settlers were predominantly Scottish and Presbyterian.<sup>2</sup> Her mother's parents and brothers all farmed in the area.

The large network of Winnie's maternal family provided stories which my sisters and I loved to hear and which took us not only across the world to New Zealand but also back to mid nineteenth-century Ireland. At their centre was her formidable grandmother. Ellen Silke left a Galway village in 1866, aged twenty, and set off for New Zealand, as a government-sponsored migrant,<sup>3</sup> to join John Crowe, to whom she was engaged. She worked in Christchurch for a couple of years, till in 1868 they married. After farming first in South Canterbury, they moved in 1882 with their four first children to Southland. In this southernmost region settlers were still sparse and cheap mortgages were available. The Crowes and their neighbours the O'Hallorans, with others who followed, built up a strong Irish community in their area. It was sustained by economic networks and intermarriage, and perhaps still more by shared culture. Irish was commonly spoken while the older generation survived.<sup>4</sup> Evenings were often passed with stories and song, especially during the visits of Larry Hynes, the travelling Galway storyteller, who cycled from one community or farmstead to another on regular circuits.<sup>5</sup> Catholic practices were part of daily and weekly routine, and the year was structured by the religious as well as the agricultural calendar. Monthly race meetings also brought the community together: they were great family occasions, as were wakes, funerals and weddings. All social and ceremonial events were lubricated by whisky, which was also seen as a medicine. There was a strong sense of shared and reciprocal responsibility beyond the family as well as within it, based originally, as my mother pointed out, on necessity.<sup>6</sup>

My grandmother disliked the wife of one of her neighbours, Mrs O'Halloran. But they had to help each other, for there were no doctors, no nurses, no social services, no public services such as water or electricity, no public transport. Co-operation was an absolute necessity.

Like other aspects of their lives, reciprocal help was gendered. In my mother's childhood, when someone was lost in the 'bush' (wild country), people gathered from all around at the nearest farmhouse and the men went out in search-parties while the women cooked endless food.

Winnie's father, Michael Gonley (c.1874-1933), left his home in the north-west of Ireland as a young man. After a spell at sea he worked his way around Australia, then ended up in Southland at the turn of the century. After marriage, he and Winnie Crowe settled in Otautau, a small country town where he had the main-street barber's shop and a billiard hall (and took bets under the counter), while she ran an adjoining newspaper shop with stationery and fancy-goods. The growing family—Winnie was the third of five children—lived in a house behind the business premises. Gonley installed a generator, and theirs was the first building in town with electricity, as subsequently with gas. They made monthly visits back to the Crowe farm some twenty miles away, by horse and buggy and later by car. Winnie retained fond memories of the place and the visits.<sup>7</sup>

In the late 1920s the aging Ellen Crowe joined this household, and Winnie and her sister nursed her in her final illness. Winnie loved her stories of Galway life.<sup>8</sup> Her grandmother made her promise to be present at her laying-out: a woman of her family had to be there. That it was to be Winnie rather than her mother or her sister reflected the special relationship between them.<sup>9</sup>

In the early photographs Winnie's mother (another Winnie) looks lively and alert, and in family stories too she sounds spirited. She decreed that boots and shoes were always to be cleaned by the boys, because she had hated having to clean her seven brothers' boots! But by the time of the letters that I have, which start from 1931, she is a shadowy figure, terminally ill. A letter from Winnie to Dan in the months before her death suggests the complexity of the parental relationship.<sup>10</sup>

They who hate and quarrel, they know a love more perfect than I have or could have imagined: whose apparent lack of love induced cynicism in me, now its revelation has made [me] humble and awe-struck. What I have thought sentimentalism no it is not that. It is opposed to reason as sentiment-

talism is, but it is a real fundamental love, deeper than consciousness: so that my mother's death will be in some sort the destruction of my father's life.

This proved all too true: without her mother, who died in June 1932, the spring of her father's life ran down. The business faltered; he grew ill and increasingly difficult to live with; and in September 1933 he too died.

Winnie's parents were literate and respected education, though their own formal schooling had been scant. Her mother tried to limit domestic responsibilities for her daughters so as to support their studies. (Mollie became a domestic science teacher in Invercargill.) Her father liked reading;<sup>11</sup> he also stressed the importance of qualifications for girls, because it was harder for women to earn a decent living without.<sup>12</sup> When Winnie's teacher suggested she try for a scholarship to a prestigious Catholic boarding-school in Dunedin, they endorsed the idea. She and her father took the train there and stayed in a hotel; and to make the most of being in the city, he took her to the theatre each evening.<sup>13</sup> Late nights notwithstanding, she won the scholarship. At St Dominic's she received a solid academic grounding, especially in French and Latin, with a brilliant group of friends. She went on to Otago University in 1927 (again with a scholarship), and there the group maintained their friendship, not least through their 'Ten Stone Club' (whose members banned all boring discussion of weight). From then till 1932 she studied languages and literature. During the vacations she returned to Otautau, where she cared in turn for her grandmother, mother and father in their final illnesses; ran the house (which included getting up at five to get the washing done);<sup>14</sup> and worked in the shop, on weekdays open from nine, sometimes till eleven.<sup>15</sup>

#### MODERN IN DUNEDIN

Winnie in Dunedin was a modern young woman. She and her friends stood out in the rather stuffy provincial town. They smoked, drank, danced and went to the cinema;<sup>16</sup> despite exiguous funds they dressed with flair; they flouted conventional curfews and segregation. Winnie's close friends were both women and men, scientists as well as arts graduates, all full of intellectual vitality and eager for talk. She read extensively: classics and contemporary literature, Russian, American and European, in French and sometimes Italian as well as in English. She threw herself into studying. After one summer vacation she wrote: 'I long to work, tremendously hard

work, Anglo-Saxon grammar, anything.'<sup>17</sup>

During her student years Winnie wrote reviews, poetry and stories.<sup>18</sup> She helped establish the Otago Literary Society (1931); and as editor and contributor was closely involved with the annual *Otago University Review*. Fellow-editor Geoffrey Cox's recollection of editorial meetings is 'above all of laughter.'<sup>19</sup>

Winnie brought to them not only her keen intelligence, but her marvellous sense of humour. It was not a mocking sense of humour, but rather one of sheer enjoyment of life in all its variety.

He notes that in these years literature was seen as 'an effete activity' for men; and this gave a particularly important role to the universities and to women.<sup>20</sup>

Winnie, as one of the leading University writers of the time, therefore played a wider role than just contributing to the University publications which became the main outlet for new writers. It was a role of importance for New Zealand literature as a whole, not just for the work of students. And Winnie's influence was wider than her own writing, because she also gave unstinting support and encouragement to other writers, or would-be writers, of the time.

...

She was a very good literary editor. She could detect the potential in a piece of prose or verse which at first sight had seemed destined for the waste-paper basket, and would often seek out the author and suggest ways in which it could be modified or developed.

Winnie's MA thesis, 'New Zealand Life in Contemporary Literature' (1932), starts by exploring national character. She recognizes the strong tie with Britain ('of all England's colonies, New Zealand is the most remote in space from the Mother Country but nearest to her in time'),<sup>21</sup> yet suggests differences which are also advantages: Maori influence on literature and art; cosmopolitanism resulting from mixed origins; and comparative absence of class distinction ('the lack of rank and blood and ... of a leisured class'). She examines novels, autobiography, short stories and poetry by various writers, then in the last chapter focuses on Katherine Mansfield. Mansfield left New Zealand for Europe in 1908, produced a series of exquisite short stories while living a tempestuous Bohemian life, but died of tuberculosis in 1923. For Winnie, she was 'one of the finest modern English prose-writers': a very early recognition.<sup>22</sup> The thesis revealed Winnie's critical powers as well

as her wide reading, but work on it was a struggle, especially when reading minor works of fiction. She commented in one letter: 'I'm sick of my thesis, fed up with typing. It is only fifth rate literary criticism of tenth-rate novelists for the most part, except when I talk about Katherine + there it is an impertinence.'<sup>23</sup>

In 1931 she had met the young Dan Davin, in his first term at Otago University. He was another Irish Southlander, a railwayman's son from Invercargill, the regional centre.<sup>24</sup> Winnie was soon guiding his development. She introduced him to modern literature (especially Joyce, Proust, and the Russians, but also Lawrence, Compton Mackenzie, Huxley and various French authors) and to older writers such as Thomas Hardy and George Moore;<sup>25</sup> and she brought him into her sparkling circle of older friends. The letters between them during vacations (when they lived with their families respectively in Otautau and Invercargill, thirty long miles apart) show the rapid growth of passion alongside intellectual support and exchange.<sup>26</sup> Although stormy and for a time interrupted, their emotional and intellectual relationship endured for the rest of their lives.

Throughout 1932 Winnie did courses at the Teacher Training College in Dunedin, while working on her thesis there and during the visits home. After a summer in Otautau, without success in finding a teaching post, she returned to Dunedin in March 1933 and supported herself by coaching and successive temporary teaching posts, at the Dunedin Technical Institute and in small-town and rural schools. She kept on her Dunedin room with a sympathetic landlady and came back for weekends. Gossip about her relationship with Dan almost certainly blocked her from regular employment.<sup>27</sup>

Over the summer of 1933-4 she and Dan saw more of each other in Southland. Dan was again living with his family in Invercargill, and working on the wharfs at Bluff, the port. Several letters from her express her happiness. 'I'm jubilant and excited and glad, but I'm content too and certain,' she wrote; 'I'm so dripping with happiness, with love of you, that I'm sure this letter will be Ethel M Dellish or something horrible and you'll wish you had a good girl who wouldn't be so sentimental and rhapsodical.'<sup>28</sup>

Then in February 1934 she heard that Toni McGrath, ex-flatmate and close friend who had left for Britain in 1932, had killed herself. Shortly after that she was asked to do two months teaching in Balclutha—too far to visit

Dunedin easily. She threw herself into the new job and also continued her studies: embarking on an Honours year in French she told Dan that she would be writing to him only in French.<sup>29</sup> At the end of March there was a further fearful blow: Harry Aitken, another dear friend, also in Britain, had died of a brain haemorrhage. With support from Dan and others she soldiered on. Then on 28 June her much-loved younger brother Mick was killed in a car accident in Otautau. She abandoned the current teaching post and the French courses, and retreated to Otautau and the shop, at times close to breakdown.

Dan, in the months after Mick's death, was studying hard and trying for a Rhodes Scholarship. He was also restless. According to his biographer, Keith Ovenden, he may have felt 'an element of duress' in Winnie's need for his support.<sup>30</sup> In any case he developed an infatuation with someone else, and in December, after hearing that he had not won the coveted scholarship, he disappeared with her for eight days. Winnie and he met only to quarrel bitterly. An estrangement followed.<sup>31</sup>

Encouraged by news that he had gained a first in English Dan pulled himself together. He decided to do an MA in Latin and try again for the Rhodes; the infatuation began to fade. By Easter Winnie and he had made it up. As Ovenden comments, the bonds between them were in some ways strengthened.<sup>32</sup>

It is easy to see that Winnie was now tied to Dan: what it may be too easy to lose sight of is that he was equally bound to her. What they had shared in four short years, both of happiness and misery, gain and loss, immeasurably outweighed anything that any third person might try to interpose between them. In its own way this brought a kind of peace to Winnie. She always feared that her Dan would be unfaithful to her, and her fears were often enough realized, but she rarely underestimated the strength of her own hold over him, and, as the future was to show, he never underestimated the power of her mind or the subtlety of her judgement, on both of which he was dependent.

This pattern of mutual dependence did indeed continue for the rest of their lives, if with fluctuations.

Over the following year Dan applied himself to work—an honours year in Latin—and also to building support for his second Rhodes application. This time, in December 1935, he was to succeed. But Winnie had given up her Dunedin room and was stuck in Otautau, where without Mick she was now in charge of both businesses. She spent a quiet year: as she wrote to

her friend Mary Hussey, her life consisted of 'grief and worry due to business reverses, amusement over the Young Lovers [her older sister Mollie was courting], and occasionally an hour of enjoyment achieved (usually) through alcohol.' She was often depressed and subdued. In March she wrote to Dan, 'We have in five years somehow in some incomprehensible manner changed places. You are now confident and insouciant, I incredulous and inept.'<sup>33</sup> They decided that he should go ahead to Oxford, and she should try to sell the ailing Otautau business and then join him.

Before he was due to leave, however, there was a fire in the Otautau billiard saloon which spread to the house. Winnie described it to Mary Hussey a few days later.

About 1.30 [a.m.] on Sunday—Mick's anniversary—Ray Hope found the shop + saloon burning, + rushed round + woke me up. There were two men with him + they were all a bit tight, but we tried to put it out with buckets of water. It was no good. So we shifted out the piano, the honeysuckle chest, sewing machine + I grabbed a few clothes and then the policeman made me come out, although there was still time but the sitting room was burning by then and nearly all my books were there. I got the books from the top of the piano + those from my bedroom, but my bookcase with most of them were burnt.<sup>34</sup>

This event was in some ways a liberation, though Winnie felt 'terrible,' not only at the loss of her books: 'I've wished that place burnt, and I felt as if a man you'd sometimes felt like murdering lay dying of poison, and you wondered almost if your wishing had done it.' They kept the tobacco and papers business going next door, and restarted the billiards before long. But Winnie was able to join Dan for a series of farewells not only in Invercargill but in Dunedin, up the coast of the North Island in Opunake (where they announced that they were engaged), and finally in Auckland, whence on 12 August 1936 he sailed for Europe. Because the Rhodes Scholarship astonishingly did not cover his fares to Oxford, he had approached the father of a student friend with connections to the NZ Shipping Line to try and arrange for him to work his way over, with the result that he was 'shouted' a first-class passage.<sup>35</sup> (One of Winnie's friends was less fortunate. In 1936 she won a scholarship to study anatomy at the Middlesex Hospital in London, but it was withdrawn on the eve of her departure, because they had 'no facilities' for women.)

The insurance money from the fire eventually allowed Winnie too to set

off for Europe. She wired Dan in April 1937 that she was coming;<sup>36</sup> set up a London bank account complete with cheque book, money to be paid every three months, so that I can't starve and can't spend too much;<sup>37</sup> and on 18 May sailed from Wellington, where her friends gave her a fine send-off ('letters, flowers and books which made me feel like a prima donna leaving our shores'),<sup>38</sup> to Sydney, where she boarded the S.S. Ormonde for the main voyage, via Colombo and Suez to the Mediterranean.

A high-spirited letter from the first ship survives; here and in letters from the Ormonde to her sister Molly she comes over as a popular passenger who enjoyed meeting all kinds of people.<sup>39</sup> She practised her French whenever possible. A Norwegian fellow passenger, William Aasberg, who had lived in Paris, worried that she would have trouble finding work there.<sup>40</sup>

But I just laugh. I'm not worried. I thought of the etymology of 'feckless' the other day...[It] is from A.S. [Anglo-Saxon] feoh property, or money. Isn't that a pleasing thought.

In a letter to Dan from the Ormonde she is less confident.<sup>41</sup> She has dreamt that her father, hands on her shoulders, warned her not to go: 'There is disaster for you at the end of your voyage, and I said, I am going. Nothing + nobody will stop me.' Worrying about Dan, she has written a charm to protect them. And she is 'terribly frightened in strange ports,' partly because too much alone: the passengers she gets on with 'all travel en famille or avec ami and I don't.' Still, she has decided to make Paris her headquarters rather than settle in Oxford near him.

I think you get such long holidays there is no need for me to be in England all the terms and just living in Paris would be a good thing for my French. I might take classes at the Sorbonne yet, if finance isn't too hellish. What do you think?

She plans to try for a job in the Paris Exhibition.

#### PARIS: 'I'M LEARNING TO LIVE IN A CITY'

Dan came to meet her when the Ormonde reached Toulon on 25 June. They stayed there a while, spent two weeks on the beach at Rapallo, moved on to Florence, then retreated to Paris, in flight from heat and mosquitos. Two exuberant letters to Mary Hussey supply vignettes of other residents in the block of modest apartments where they settled, on the Square de Port-Royal; tell of visits from several of Dan's Oxford friends; what she had liked

in that year's Paris Exhibition, especially the related Van Gogh Exhibition ('I'm absolutely exhausted after this attempt to tell you of what was for me a great pleasure and also a tremendous experience'); and present set-pieces on a night out and on buying a new suit.<sup>42</sup>

Before I bought my autumn suit I had come to a fearful pass for clothes, being indeed in the mortifying case of being unable not only to find in my wardrobe clothes that were in the slightest degree decorative, but being quite incapable indeed of producing anything that was not either overwhelmingly hot or too thin for this weather, and moreover none of my clothes, whether too hot or too thin were by this time clean. I put on therefore my linen dress, which I bought in New Zealand and wore there and on the boat, and which is my kitchen dress here and which has not been washed for three weeks because it is forbidden to wash in these rooms and laundry is dear, and I donned Mollie's farm rain-coat, which is begrimed with the dust of three continents since it left Mabel Bush, and with a beret and my green suede shoes which have undergone an amelioration without cause—it must be a sea-change—I shambled down the Champs Elysées, the cynosure of all eyes, which so disconcerted me as to force me to light a cigarette. There I found an establishment 'de haute couture,' and there I stayed till I was transformed into so elegant a creature that when I swaggered forth I was again the cynosure of the Champs Elysées. In the establishment of haute couture I was treated with extraordinary consideration and deference, the general opinion being, I think, that a woman who dressed like that must be either foreign royalty or an international spy in disguise, or else a millionairess.

Both Winnie and Dan were studying:

He's reading Plato and I'm procrastinating. I've been reading a good deal, English + French, but nothing of world-shaking importance.

They played chess—on the night out described, after the 'Boule Blanche' night-club closed they 'buzzed off to the Dome, one of the very big Montparnasse cafés, where we drank coffee and played chess and I checkmated Dan 3 times for the first time in my life.' They ate cheaply but well in a neighbourhood restaurant ('L'Alsacienne'), and they walked a lot. There is no mention of meeting anyone French, and life even in cosmopolitan Montmartre was perhaps quieter at times than they had expected.

Dan misses his Oxford friends though not as much as his N.Z. groups. But here there's no-one to talk to. Of course I'm used to that from Otautau, + there's all the world to look at. But you get tired of gaping at people you don't know, + to go about costs money, + besides we both have to work. So we don't go around much.

Family stories record high spots, however: their performance of an 'aero-plane dance,' the night when they were out celebrating Dan's birthday with a friend and Winnie stormed off in a huff and ended up in 'Le Monocle' (a lesbian-run night-club), the time she put their last coins into a fruit machine instead of buying cigarettes to last them till funds could be replenished—and won.

At the end of September Dan returned to Oxford for the new term. Winnie stayed on, studying at the Alliance Française, taking German lessons, visiting exhibitions, doing some coaching and some writing, and looking for freelance work.<sup>43</sup> She had a lively time with friends they had made over the summer and with new ones. In one letter to Dan she wrote in mock penitence, 'I wish I weren't so susceptible, darling, and led a more retired life, but it's always like this. Things happen all the time, so I suppose it's the way I am shaped.'<sup>44</sup> The core group of friends were Americans and a German; others mentioned are Turkish, Moroccan, Norwegian and a very persistent Pole whom she had to fend off. There was sometimes some heavy drinking. After 'a booze' which lasted 'from 11 a.m., ending as far as cautious questions will disclose at 6 a.m.,' Winnie told Dan, 'I was completely drunk for the first time in my life I now realize... The result is a state of abject penitence.'<sup>45</sup> Another letter describes a night which began near the Place de Monge.<sup>46</sup>

Well we stayed a fair while in the Café, sipping and drinking, and called at another café near there where some prostitutes were making merry singing songs. We got very chummy; they were reckless careless merry devils, unkempt and unworried, and we got into a sort of impromptu figure dance, they and I, while Norman + Betty sat there laughing, and Peter scowled + smiled alternately. When we emerged a bit tight we wandered vaguely over the street, where a policeman jumped out of the shadows + demanded to see our *Passports*. Of course Peter had his and of course the rest of us hadn't so the Policeman said we'd have to go to the Centrale Police + answer questions. (It's about one o'clock by then.) He pointed to the Police Car, a long thing with seats like a bus, fairly full of policemen. Well darling as soon as I saw it I leapt over and jumped in, yelling with delight, and some police got out to make room for us, and away we went. I sang most of the time, and captured the admiration of a young fresh-faced policeman who spent the rest of our morning in the Police Centrale trying to grab my hand surreptitiously + make a date + asking me anxiously if I thought the agents de Paris were pas gentils. Well, they weren't. They wouldn't let us go.

Released eventually, the revellers went off to Montparnasse and the Monocle (where her last visit had ended in discord).

Peter danced with 3 taxi-girls who didn't ask him for a drink, while I smoked cigars cynically + listened to the proprietress who tried to persuade me that the last time was a misunderstanding on my part, + bribed me to friendliness by divulging State Information that Marlene Dietrich was coming to the Monocle again the next night... she said they were keeping it dark to keep out all the unwanted spectators—just *entre nous*, honey. Then we went to the Dome, where they wouldn't cook us anything, + I found our Norwegian novelist "Only the tame birds have a longing"<sup>47</sup> sitting outside the terrace in the bitter cold so we all went to the Coupole where Peter + he quarrelled bitterly while Norman + Betty + I ate eggs + bacon. So ended another Parisian night.

As the end of term approached, they discussed plans for the vacation. Winnie was torn between staying in Paris to show him her discoveries ('I'm learning to live in a city') and the lure of further travel.<sup>48</sup>

If you like, we will stay in Paris, but I think I'd sooner go to Germany, or Holland, or Italy, and perhaps return to Paris before you go to England. But why Freiburg? I don't care, but I think Munich sounds a good city, + I've got a fearful lust to see all the cities of Europe. I'm turning into a devouring lion of cities. Well, come to Paris + we shall see. Or what about living in London? I had made up my mind to go there, + try to find all Toni's things, + see people I knew, + try to reconcile all my lives to each other.

In the end, Paris won the immediate contest.<sup>49</sup> But by the end of the vacation she had decided to leave. Money was probably a major reason: she was not managing to earn much there. Perhaps fun with friends was beginning to pall, or to seem too much of a distraction from study and creative writing. Lacking French friends, her progress with spoken French may have seemed discouragingly slow. She had not yet been to England either: was this from love of Paris, the wish to assert her independence, or simple procrastination? Or was it because of the painful association with her friend Toni's suicide in 1934. Perhaps now the desire to find out what happened to Toni prevailed.

#### LONELY IN LONDON; SEASONAL MIGRATION

In mid-January Winnie came to England. Dan was back in Oxford and she spent much of her time on endless job applications for teaching work—in Lausanne, in Prague, as governess with a family about to go to Rome. Her first letters to him are rather bleak: it is cold, she has no money, she misses him, London friends are mostly away. Far worse, when she finds

people who had known Toni their account is deeply distressing: in her last months she had frequented low dives in Frith St where she was 'a kitten among the wolves,' she was penniless, ill and depressed.<sup>50</sup>

Towards the end of the month Winnie began to take heart. Friends returned, and she went to see paintings and plays with them. The *Evening Standard* printed her article about the New Zealand mutton-bird and its cultural and economic importance, especially to the Maori, and sent a cheque.<sup>51</sup> And finally she got a job, two months at St Helen's School, Willesden Green. This was followed in May by a post teaching English and Latin at a Surrey convent school.

From then until Dan's Finals in the summer of 1939, they lived apart during term, snatching weekend visits when they could, and spent vacations together, usually in Paris, where the patterns set in their first visit continued. Her attitude to life there was perhaps more equivocal. She wrote from Paris in January 1938 to Marge Thompson (another Ten-Stone Club member).<sup>52</sup>

I think a mass emigration from N.Z. is indicated—not because living is pleasant here, it's usually damned unpleasant, but at least you feel as if you're in the main stream of life, + enjoying + enduring the destiny of our generation. Once you're in it that sees for some incomprehensible reason, important.

Her writing was stalled, and her confidence low:

As for me, I can't write anything. I can't even talk without stammering. I have a scheme in hand but don't know if I'll ever get it done. I'll let you know if I do. Can't be bothered talking about it. It's no good anyhow just a pot-boiler. Hope I can find a publisher to agree with me if I ever get it done.

While Dan had 'seven short stories finished now, and about 20 Poems,' she reports: 'I've written nothing lately. I think all I did was drivel anyway.' More-over the future was uncertain, both personally and politically.

Dan changes his mind at least once a month as to what he intends to do after June. Lately he thought he would return to N.Z. but now he is determined to stay grimly in London + intends to attempt to get a job connected with publishing.

She ends the letter again summoning her friend: 'come over for the war. We'll weather it together. Isn't it hell? Everyone here just awaits it fatalistically.'

With Dan's First in Oxford in June 1939 he was released from the

Rhodes obligation of bachelorhood and in July they married, deciding also to start a family; then left to savour a final summer in Paris before the inevitable outbreak of war. On 1 September they heard of the invasion of Poland from their Norwegian friend Annie, and confirmed it with Geoff Cox, now foreign correspondent for the *Daily Express*. After a day of packing and farewells,<sup>53</sup>

We spent our remaining francs on a last delicious French dinner at the Rotonde, then left Paris on a desperately full train, and embarked at Dieppe on an even more crowded ship, but Dan found a Balliol friend, Peter, aboard, and they threw me up on to a stack of luggage where I crouched comfortably while they stood all night.

#### WIFE AND MOTHER; WARTIME AND AFTER

Back in England Winnie returned to teaching; Dan joined up. Then, pregnant and aware how little time together might be left, she became a camp-follower. I was born in Oxford in July 1940. Dan was now a second lieutenant in the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and Winnie (with me) again turned camp-follower till his Battalion sailed early in 1941.

By the autumn, Winnie and Anna were established at the Bristol University Settlement, which for three years provided home and ready-made community as well as useful work and a supplement to the meagre stipend of a soldier's dependent. She was responsible for a hostel in the country, providing respite for mothers and children from the difficulties of wartime daily life. It took considerable energy (besides ingenuity and even charm) to equip, fund and run it, but the project was successful and satisfying.<sup>54</sup>

In August 1944 Dan returned from the front line in Italy to take up a post in the War Office, as New Zealand representative on the Control Committee for Germany. We lived in a small and dilapidated house in Notting Hill, my sister Delia a baby. Suddenly there was family life, under the difficult conditions of rationing, blackout, flying bombs and coal shortage. In 1945 Dan was recruited by the Oxford University Press, and the family—soon increased by the birth of Brigid—settled in Oxford.

#### OXFORD

The contrast between life before the war and after was huge. Dan's stipend at the Press was at first no more than his Rhodes Scholarship had

been, but now it had to support a family. Winnie's time was consumed by domestic labour—as once in Otautau—and by childcare. In February 1947 the Oxford household was joined by Elisabeth Berndt and four-year-old Patty, born in 1943 after an affair between Elisabeth and Dan in Egypt. They had been living in Palestine, but after the war Elisabeth found it increasingly hard to manage, despite remittances from Dan. Eventually Dan and Winnie managed to get an English work permit for her, and the last money from the Otautau business bought their fares (instead of the washing machine for which it had been earmarked). Winnie of course knew about the affair (now thoroughly over), but wary of gossip they explained Elisabeth as a Danish refugee and their housekeeper. She and Patty stayed in Oxford, mostly with us, for the next three and a half years. In the winter of 1949-50, when Winnie made a trip back to New Zealand, Elisabeth looked after the household.<sup>55</sup> Delia, Brigid and I adored Patty and wished she could be our sister, not knowing till many years later that in fact she was.

Winnie started to do part-time editorial work, mainly home-based, and marked school exam papers. She worked with Dan editing *New Zealand Short Stories* and *Katherine Mansfield: Selected Stories* (both Oxford University Press World's Classics 1953) and *English Short Stories of Today* (OUP 1958, reissued as *Classic English Short Stories*, OUP 1988); she did indexes and proof-reading for the Oxford University Press; and she worked on the *Oxford Junior Encyclopedia* as contributor and as editor of Volume 11 ('The Home,' 1958), then supervised the Encyclopaedia's US edition. She worked fulltime only from 1967 till 1974, in OUP's Education Department. On reaching retirement age she continued part-time work, on dictionaries.

All the years in Oxford they kept open house. *Closing Times*, Dan's collection of memoirs of friends, was appropriately dedicated 'to W.K.D without whom there would have been neither friends nor book.' Visitors came from far and wide to 103 Southmoor Road (and its extension in the local pub), and through Winnie's labour and skills family life was enriched rather than jeopardized by the endless hospitality. What suffered, perhaps, was her own creative writing. Dan's work, his needs and those of children and visitors always came before hers. After a sonnet sequence written when Dan first returned, she seems to have produced only a handful of poems. Most were written when away from the domestic scene: one on the way to New

Zealand in 1949, two or three in the fifties (possibly when Dan was away), and two on a visit to my sister in China in 1964.

If Dan, as published writer and as publisher, was even by the fifties the better-known figure, the quality of Winnie's intellect, as well as her warmth and wit, were recognized by intimates. The poet Louis MacNeice was an especially close friend, until his premature death in 1963. So was the novelist Joyce Cary. As Cary's health deteriorated Winnie became his right hand. After his death in 1957, as literary executor she brought unfinished work to posthumous publication, supervised the transfer of his papers and books to the Bodleian Library, and for many years supported and advised scholars working on Cary. Her essay on him for the *Dictionary of National Biography* is exemplary.

Winnie loved Kiwi visitors, and remained eager to the last for news of friends, family, events and developments there. She always saw herself as a New Zealander, for instance wryly identifying her amazing resourcefulness as 'pioneer spirit.' There was also perhaps inevitably some sense of loss. Here is a poem, 'Homing Charm' (1949), written on the voyage back for her first return visit.

*Homing Charm*

The Milky Way  
The Coal Sack  
The Southern Cross.

In my mother's room the fire glows,  
In the dark we prime the pump,  
My father sings a sailor's song.

The Milky Way  
The Coal Sack  
The Southern Cross

Enclose the world.  
The sky becomes itself again  
In love and fear and faith again.

The Milky Way  
The Coal Sack  
The Southern Cross

Roof my lost world.

The Plough to which I set my hand  
Is faraway and long ago.

L'Envoi      Venus and Pleiades guide me,  
Guide me from my lost world,  
Homing to the stern Pole Star.

This poem reveals and distils her different cultural worlds. It suggests the tension between the 'homes' of southern and northern hemisphere, remembered and present, with their differing stars and constellations. As a charm, it evokes on the one hand the protective charms of her Galway grandmother and on the other the Anglo-Saxon texts which she had studied, still more ancient, but more recently learnt. The modern city girl evokes the rural cabin, and casts her electricity-loving father back into firelight and memories of his youthful sailor days. The Oxford wife and mother admits loss and uncertainty, yet plays with the cosmos. Cosmopolitan, she seeks home on both sides of the world.

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As students Winnie and her Dunedin friends, would-be free spirits, looked longingly to Europe for intellectual, artistic, spiritual and perhaps sexual freedom, though they knew that the life of the pioneer held its dangers in the old world too. Dan's first year, before Winnie joined him, was marked by depression.<sup>56</sup> Bohemia was perhaps especially risky for women. Katherine Mansfield had blazed the trail and died young; and Winnie's friend Toni McGrath also fell. Winnie and Dan's Paris experiences, though exhilarating, had their limits; and she gave up her attempt to survive there independent.

The youthful vision was not wholly extinguished, even by the war, though it changed for each of them. Dan, despite a fulltime job and family life, for years kept one foot in Fitzrovia—London's postwar Bohemia. Winnie brought Bohemia into our Oxford home. She made it a cultural hub, where visitors brought and found continual supplies of literary and artistic sustenance, of talk and song, and where weary or hard-up writers and artists renewed their energies. This domestic microcosm was not a conventional nuclear family. It combined the ancestral Irish love of talk and company, the settler need for reciprocity and complementarity, the escape from stifling tradition into the adventure of the modern city and the sweep

of global culture. It embodied Winnie's imagination and generosity, and in it she glowed and we thrived. Her eager intellect, her passion for poetry, people and life, continued to draw others as once Europe had beckoned her.

As a cultural migrant from halfway across the world she had arrived in Europe seeking to escape intellectual and social constrictions and to embrace the heart of culture. The shape of what she sought was formed before she came. A letter to Dan from Otautau in 1932 illumines some of her fantasies about Europe:<sup>57</sup>

I play a fascinating game of backgrounds for us. Us in a farmhouse. Us in a flat with Swedish steel furniture, sharp clear outlines, austere shadows. Us in vast rooms in Paris, full of ornate furniture, faded gilt, thick beautiful curtains. Us in strange warm hotels, steam in their corridors: and weary in foreign trains, exhausted after the strain of making Russians and Hungarians and Lapps understand what we want to eat and where we want to sleep. Us at Covent Garden hearing the operas. Have you heard any operas, darling? In the smiling half-consciousness with which sensual singing and music after dinner envelops one. And climbing mountains. Snow and cold and the glow the triumph of being warm. We shall know all the works of all men, and all the corners of the earth, uh, Dan?

Earlier generations had left Ireland for New Zealand in search of opportunity; now she returned, but it was the siren song of Europe and Paris which she heard, the romance of European civilization (to which she saw England as marginal), in both classical and modern form.

Yet the relation (complementary and dialectic) between one side of the world and the other remained inescapable. She was not returning to her roots; nor soliciting cultural endorsement in the colonial Mother Country. She did not leave behind her Irish heritage or her New Zealand education, formal and informal. She already had her passion for words, for language, for people, for stories, for the beautiful. A New Zealander in Europe, but a cosmopolitan as much as an exile, as she narrated her experiences in Europe for her correspondents 'back home,' she was shaping her own understandings, of what she had left behind, who they were, what she might have been, what she was. Like other migrants in the world system she was trying to 'reconcile all my lives to each other,' across generations and the globe.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Keith Ovenden, *A Fighting Withdrawal: the Life of Dan Davin, Writer, Soldier, Publisher*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996. It was written after Dan's death in 1990 and before Winnie's in 1995; she worked closely with the author in its preparation and sent him comments on the final draft.

<sup>2</sup> See James Belich, *Making Peoples: a History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the end of the Nineteenth Century*, Allen Lane, Penguin Press, Auckland, 1996, chap 13, esp. p.316. The early organizers of immigration to NZ tried to keep Irish numbers down and to bring only Protestant Irish, but between the 1860s and the 1890s this proved impossible. The 100,000 assisted emigrants in the 1870s were at least 25 per cent Irish, and at least three quarters Catholic. Moreover single women were in short supply, and young Irish women were more ready than others to migrate. Charlotte Macdonald shows that of the 3,810 single women brought to the province of Canterbury between 1857 and 1871, a third were Irish: *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in 19c New Zealand*, Allen and Unwin, Wellington NZ, 1990, p.44.

<sup>3</sup> See Macdonald, *A Woman of Good Character*, p. 66 for Ellen Silke, and chapter 3 for general conditions during the passage. In family tradition it took six months.

<sup>4</sup> In my mother's family Irish was spoken as well as English until her grandmother's death in 1930. My father's father regularly brought Irish-speaking friends back for Sunday lunch and afternoons.

<sup>5</sup> My father too had heard the classic Irish stories from Hynes. Long afterwards, on a visit to Dublin in the 1950s (?) they met Seamas Delargy of the Irish Folklore Commission, who was delighted to hear what had become of the last Hynes brother—the older six had all been traced and recorded.

<sup>6</sup> Transcript, as note 2.

<sup>7</sup> Later Winnie wrote in a letter to Dan ('Sunday night by the fire.' [24 Jan 32]): 'I wish you had known my grandmother. We could have stayed with her: you would have harvested, and I would have carried tea down to the paddocks in the hot sun. And as soon as harvesting was finished it would have rained, steadily. We could build great fires of pine cones and read and talk till the fire made us sleepy so that it was pleasant to hop out for a walk in the rain. And at night it would be good, with great fires, and the flickering lamp, and to bed early, because the lamp used to go out at 11.30, and we have to be up early in the morning. Getting heaps of pine cones in the plantation, very early in the morning: before breakfast, because it smells so good then. You see, it *always* rained at night at my grandmother's.'

<sup>8</sup> Later she told them to us: see Davin, 'Historical Novels for Children,' *History Workshop Journal*, 1, 1976, pp. 156-7.

<sup>9</sup> 'I went and got Mrs Connell, as my grandmother had instructed me. We brought into the room the trunk in which my grandmother kept perfect her burial clothes, airing them occasionally, ironing them to make sure they were not suffering from damp, and replacing white silk stockings which I regularly commandeered for tennis matches. We unpacked the exquisitely embroidered and tucked white nightdress, the white silk stockings, the brown Franciscan shroud with white applique crosses. We washed

the corpse, closed the eyes, sealed the entrances, clothed the body, lighted the candles.' Transcript as note 2.

<sup>10</sup> WKG to DMD, Otautau, Monday [6 June 1932]. Reading a life of Tolstoy, after the war, she saw similarities in his relation with his wife.

<sup>11</sup> My aunt Mollie told me that sometimes he would spend a whole Sunday reading Dickens or Wilkie Collins: notes from my 1984 visit.

<sup>12</sup> This perception was probably sharpened by the difficulties his widowed mother had experienced during his childhood.

<sup>13</sup> It may have been then that she saw Shaw's 'St Joan' (published in 1924). Joan of Arc was canonized in 1922 and Winnie took the name Joan upon her confirmation soon afterwards.

<sup>14</sup> KG to DMD, 'Otautau, Monday' [8 Feb. 1932].

<sup>15</sup> Mollie Baird: notes from my 1984 visit.

<sup>16</sup> She and her friends used to wash their hair before going to a matinee and sit next powerful heating vents to dry it as they watched the film.

<sup>17</sup> WKG to DMD, Dunedin, Tuesday [16 Feb. 1932?].

<sup>18</sup> She won first prize in the Literary Society's 1931 Short Story Competition.

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Cox, speech at Winnie's memorial, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey Cox, speech at memorial, pp. 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> W.K. Gonley, 'New Zealand Life in Contemporary Literature' M.A. thesis, Dunedin 1932 (held in Dunedin Public Library), pp. 1-2.

<sup>22</sup> 'New Zealand Life,' p. 45. A critical bibliography of Katherine Mansfield (which Winnie did not know) by Ruth Elvish Mantz came out in 1931 (Constable, London); and there were studies by Elisabeth Schneider ('Katherine Mansfield and Chekhov,' *Modern Language Notes* 50, pp. 394-6) in June 1935, and Arthur Sewell (*Katherine Mansfield: a Critical Essay*, Auckland) in 1936: see Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield*, bibliography.

<sup>23</sup> KG to DMD, 'Wednesday night by the fire' [Otautau, ?8 June 1932]. She was also having typewriter trouble—'the ribbon won't run + the roller won't roll + my wrist is aching.'

<sup>24</sup> Dan's father, an immigrant labourer in his mid-twenties, attended primary school early in the century because employment by the railway company required literacy.

<sup>25</sup> See Ovenden, pp. 52-7 (her reading list for him p. 57).

<sup>26</sup> Winnie combined them amusingly in a letter in 1932: she was reading Einstein, and wrote, 'You're my system of co-ordinates' and 'Think of me every minute. If you don't, I'll know and I'll disintegrate into lost atoms and homeless electrons': WKG to DMD, Friday [Dunedin, 2 December 1932].

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ovenden p. 69, 78-9.

<sup>28</sup> WKG to DMD, Otautau, Thursday [18 Jan. 1934].

<sup>29</sup> WKG to DMD, Crown Hotel, Balclutha [7 March 1934].

<sup>30</sup> Ovenden, p.86.

<sup>31</sup> Her poem, 'In his own image and likeness,' was published at this point in *Otago University Review* 1935, p.65 and reflects her anger and loss.

<sup>32</sup> Ovenden, p.93.

<sup>33</sup> WKG to DMD, 18 March 1936; cit. Ovenden p.96.

<sup>34</sup> KG to Mary Hussey, 3 July 1986; see also *Otago Daily Times* Monday 29 1936, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> Winnie left a two-page account of this incident.

<sup>36</sup> COMING ARRIVING ORMONDE SUEZ DISEMBARKING TOULON TWENTYFIFTH SEE TOULON BUSINESS SOLD BABY FLOURISHING PAISH CONVERT ENGAGED DICK THOMPSON LOVE = WINUSHKA

<sup>37</sup> WKG to Mary Hussey, Wellington n.d. [?mid May 1937].

<sup>38</sup> WKG to Marge [Thompson], Mary [Hussey] and Joan [McGrath], 19 May from the R.M.S. Manganui, en route to Sydney.

<sup>39</sup> The letters to Mollie, which I saw on a visit to New Zealand in 1984, have not survived.

<sup>40</sup> WKG to Marge, Mary [Hussey] and Joan [McGrath], 19 May.

<sup>41</sup> WKG to DMD, S.S. Colombo (Orient Line), May-June 1937.

<sup>42</sup> WKG to Mary Hussey, Paris, 6 August 1937; 22 August 1937.

<sup>43</sup> Letters mention a couple of articles sent to newspapers in England and New Zealand, but I have yet to track them down.

<sup>44</sup> WKG to DMD, Paris, 8 Nov. 1937.

<sup>45</sup> WKG to DMD, Paris, undated.

<sup>46</sup> WKG to DMD, Paris, 16 Nov. 1937

<sup>47</sup> This writer thought the first sentence of his novel so good that was unable to follow it: 'Only the tame birds had a longing; the wild birds fly.'

<sup>48</sup> WKG to DMD, Paris 19 Nov. 1937.

<sup>49</sup> They did visit Germany in August 1938 (rather surprisingly perhaps). But in Munich Winnie tried to light her cigarette from the Eternal Flame at the Nazi Martyrs' Memorial; they narrowly escaped arrest for insulting behaviour and left the country.

<sup>50</sup> WKG to DMD, London, [18] Jan. and [19] Jan. 1938.

<sup>51</sup> WKG to DMD, London, 26 Jan. 1938. reports unexpected arrival of cheque (12/6): she had thought they weren't going to use the piece. I have yet to identify the issue it appeared in, but she had sent him the m.s. in a previous (undated) letter.

<sup>52</sup> WKG to Marge Thompson, Paris, 13 Jan. [1939].

<sup>53</sup> 'A Soldier's Wife,' her unsigned contribution to the New Zealand collection, Lauris Edmond with Carolyn Milward (ed.), *Women in Wartime*, Government Printing Office, Wellington (1985) reprinted Government Publications 1996, p.65.

<sup>54</sup> See 'A Soldier's Wife,' as previous note.

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed account of this episode, see Ovenden, chaps 8, 9, 10.

<sup>56</sup> See letter WKG to Marge and Mary and Joan, 19 May 1937; and Ovenden, chap. 6.

<sup>57</sup> WKG to DMD, Otautau, 24 Jan 32, 'Sunday night by the fire'