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wartime diary, 1941-1946**

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‘Went into raptures’: reading emotion in the ordinary wartime diary, 1941-1946

Alison Twells

The last two decades have seen the emergence of an ‘emotional turn’ within social and cultural history. Ground-breaking studies by William Reddy, Peter Stearns and Barbara Rosenwein, building on the pioneering work of Norbert Elias, Lucien Febvre and others in the early decades of the twentieth century, have inspired a substantial body of work which interrogates the argument that emotions are to some degree shaped by culture.¹ As Susan Matt has recently argued, Febvre was right to suggest that ‘the study of emotions would bring new energy to the field’, citing as examples recent work on political change and religious life.² However, despite the emergence of studies attentive to the difference between discourses *about* emotion and the experience *of* emotion within women’s history, gay history, men’s studies and more,³ social class has been a neglected category. More specifically, those historical sources which enable engagement with a subject’s emotional life have been largely produced by middle-class and elite individuals and groups.⁴ It remains notoriously difficult to gain access to the interior lives of ‘ordinary’ people.⁵

Scholarly interest in emotions has been one impetus for a new enthusiasm for diaries as historical sources. Recent work has explored the diary not just as a ‘chronicle of the everyday’⁶ but as ‘a template for personal change, a means of means of the tracking of the self in time.’⁷ The diary, in the words of James Hinton, is a ‘technology of the self... “the room behind the shop”, in which the diarist reflects on and prepares his or her performance, mask, persona’, enabling the construction of the self over time.⁸ Emotions - their concealment, management and expression – are central to this process. Here again, however, despite the extensive recovery work that has been a feature of feminist scholarship over the last thirty years and which has included the re-evaluation of the significance of the feminine, private and domestic spheres, ordinary diaries have been largely ignored.⁹ Literary scholars, concerned to expand the canon to admit previously marginalised women writers, have been keen to identify the literary qualities of some previously neglected diaries. When making selections for inclusion in *Revelations: Diaries of Women*, for example,

Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter focused on whether the diarist showed 'gifts for language and observation'; they emphatically ignored the 'uninteresting'.¹⁰ As Jennifer Sinor has argued in *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing*, reading through a literary lens 'privileges diaries that are coherent, crafted, and whole', whereas 'very few frames exist for valuing that which is useful, ordinary and plain'.¹¹ Historians have approached diaries with an eye to their representative quality or their capacity to shed light on private experiences of public events.¹² Non-literary and non-elite diaries, such as the Mass Observation diaries that form the basis of numerous studies, exhibit an expansiveness, a discursive quality and a sense of audience which renders them far from 'ordinary'.¹³ As noted by Ulrich, even feminist historians have struggled to know what to do with the 'dailiness' of midwife Martha Ballard's late eighteenth century diary, which was dismissed as late as the 1970s on account of 'the trivia about domestic chores and pastimes' it contained.¹⁴ Most recently, Molly McCarthy has argued that it is difficult to make use of the vast literature on diaries precisely because most writers are not attuned to the form of the ordinary pocket diary (or the daily planner, in her terminology).¹⁵

The present article brings together these concerns to assert the significance of the 'ordinary' diary in enabling exploration of the emotional lives of non-elite women and girls. It does so through a focus on the pocket diaries of a working-class scholarship girl from the English East Midlands during the years of the Second World War. Norah Hodgkinson began keeping a diary in 1938 at the age of twelve and continued to write an entry most evenings until her death at the age of 84 in 2009. Norah's wartime diaries are commercial pocket diaries: Letts's Schoolgirls' (1939), Spratt's Game Foods (1941-1942) and the Railway Clerk's Association of Great Britain and Ireland (1943-46).¹⁶ The 'ordinariness' of these diaries derives in part from their form. They consist of small windows in which the events of the day are recorded in no more than thirty words (and sometimes considerably fewer). The entries are neither discursive nor retrospective and contain no characterisation and little in the way of a story; a feature not only of the small amount of space available to their author, but also of their status as private diaries. Much of the detail is not understandable to a reader unfamiliar with their context; indeed, it did not need to be as the author was writing only for herself.¹⁷ Jennifer Sinor argues that writing that is 'ordinary' also includes notes, calendars, telephone messages, grocery lists, memos and letters;

writing that is not crafted or storied and 'does not mark an event or narrate an idea', but which is focused on the day-to-day, fragmented, 'simple, disjointed, bare, and one-dimensional' and 'typically unseen or ignored'¹⁸ More research into the range of pocket diaries is necessary before one can suggest a neat elision between the ordinary diary and 'history from below'. What is clear, however, is that pocket diaries, while written by members of a range of social groups, constitute one of very few genres in which non-elite people documented their interior and emotional lives.

Claire Langhamer has recently argued that the 1940s and 1950s were 'decades when the emotional landscape changed dramatically for a large number of ordinary people; a period that witnessed a revolution in the value attached to emotional intimacy within heterosexual encounters.' The years of the Second World War in particular represented 'an emotional watershed', a period of sharp discontinuity between a time when a focus on emotion was tempered by material poverty and the 1950s years when 'emotion alone was increasingly enough'.¹⁹ The first part of this article explores the evidence of emotion in Norah Hodgkinson's diary for the spring and summer of 1941. During these months, sixteen year-old Norah began a correspondence with a sailor named Jim, who wrote to her after receiving a pair of socks she had knitted for the Royal Navy Comfort Fund. In recording the development of this relationship, Norah began the practice whereby her feelings about men and romance formed the most expansive and expressive entries in her diaries. Despite their ordinariness, therefore, I argue that pocket diaries nonetheless enable access to emotional lives. However, to fully understand their potential requires a focus on the specific 'emotional community'²⁰ (or communities) to which the diarist belonged. Norah Hodgkinson's early diaries, I argue, should be read in terms of the author's membership of an emotional community of schoolgirls. Such a focus reveals the importance of emotional expression as part of her gradual self-construction as a modern girl.

Michael Roper's influential critique of the tendency within gender history to 'reduce subjectivity to an after-effect of ... discourse' maps onto similar developments within the history of emotion.²¹ In her study of young women diarists in early nineteenth century America, Martha Tomhave Blauvelt has argued that the focus of 'emotionology' on social conventions concerning emotional expression tells us little

about individual agency and ability to 'enact, shape, or deny the confusing emotional directives'; about the space 'in between emotionology and the lived experience of individuals'.²² I explore these concerns through a focus on Norah's relationship with Danny, Jim's brother and a trainee officer in the RAF, to whom she transferred her affections after their first meeting in September 1941. I explore three main themes in Norah's diaries from 1941-1946: evidence of what Goodman has termed 'heightened heterosexuality', expressions of romantic love and sexual interest, and finally, anger and disappointment.²³ This article argues that diaries, including ordinary diaries, can help us to move beyond cultural directives concerning appropriate female emotional expression to develop a greater understanding of the daily crafting of the female self in wartime Britain.

The emotional range of the ordinary diary

On first reading, Norah Hodgkinson's *Spratt's* diaries for 1941 and 1942 and her 1943-1946 *Railway Clerks' Association of Great Britain and Ireland* diaries have much more in common with the 'ordinary writing' discussed by Jennifer Sinor than with more 'storied' diaries, such as the wartime diaries which form part of the Mass Observation Archive.²⁴ Like those of Annie Ray, Sinor's diarist and a Dakota homesteader of the late nineteenth century, Norah's diary entries are telegraphic, tweet-like records of her daily routines, household chores, the weather, her health, her menstrual cycle, the activities of other people. Some entries are more expansive than others; the start of 1941, for example, is particularly sparse:

Jan 1st 941 (Weds): Went to Hemington with Ma.

2nd: Snowed.

January 9th 1941: Bombs dropped at Diseworth and Wilson.

10th: Helen, Ma & I went to Long Eaton to buy a coat for Ma.

15th: Started school. Kath form captain. Raids.

18th: Ma went to Dr about her hand.

19th: Very deep snow.

22nd: New Tec by from Diseworth, Robert Lee Warner.

24th: Frank & I went to dance.²⁵

As can be seen in this example, Norah's daily entries are disjointed and bare. In terms of choice of grammar, she generally includes a verb and object, occasionally an adjective and very few adverbs or use of the personal pronoun. They are often characterised by parataxis, the juxtaposing of unrelated things; on these occasions, it is difficult to ascertain the relative importance of different events in her daily life.²⁶ As Lynn Bloom writes, such diaries can be 'so terse they seem coded; no reader outside the author's immediate society or household could understand them without extra-textual information'.²⁷

In such a confined space, Norah could not elaborate, contextualise, provide interpretation or reflection or offer character descriptions. Importantly, however, Norah would not have crafted her entries in any other way, because they were written for herself and not with their reception by other people in mind. She knew the context and the characters of the individuals who feature in them and had no need to expand upon them. While we cannot know for certain Norah's motives in beginning to write a diary - to enter more fully into the world of the scholarship girl in the first instance, maybe, alongside the desire for an aide-memoir - neither of these likely explanations requires an audience.²⁸ Indeed, even when Norah noted significant world events in her diaries, their inclusion as context or backdrop suggests that she was writing history into her own life rather than writing herself into history.²⁹

It is possible nonetheless to read emotion in Norah's diaries. She sometimes recorded her feelings as part of her daily entry. In her earliest diaries, for example, she wrote that the night before she was due to see the celebrity racing driver Prince Birabongse race at Donington Park in April 1938, she went to bed 'excited', and that she was 'awfully nervous' on the day she was a bridesmaid at her sister's wedding in August 1939. She briefly reviews books she has read, using a scale from 'Excellent' or 'Lovely' through 'Alright' to 'Absolutely awful'. Similarly, she summarises her responses to films following visits to the picture house. That Gary Cooper in *Beau Geste* was 'good', for example, suggests enjoyment; even more so her enthusiasm for Walt Disney's *Snow White* as 'the best thing ever'.³⁰ She was irritated by her elder brother and his fiancée, writing 'good shut to them' when their visit came to an end, whereas her sister's daughter, her new baby niece, was 'beautiful'.³¹

As is suggested by some of these examples, Norah's emotional expression needs to be located within the specific context of her status as a schoolgirl. Barbara Rosenwein has argued that the meaning of particular emotions depends upon the values of an 'emotional community' at a specific historical moment. Rosenwein defines 'emotional communities' as 'social groups that adhere to the same valuations of emotions and how they should be expressed' and/or 'groups of people animated by common or similar interests, values, and emotional styles and valuations.'³² In her earlier seminal article, she drew on social constructivist understandings of emotion to argue against the model of progression in manners and emotional expression as advanced by Norbert Elias and others. Rather than a steady movement towards 'civilisation', Rosenwein argued, different periods and, importantly, different communities within these periods, are characterised by 'systems of feeling' which govern the 'modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.'³³

Norah's diaries reveal that, in the early years of the war, the community of schoolgirls at her grammar school was paramount in her life. Until she left school in the summer of 1941, Norah noted on a daily basis with whom she sat on the school bus and documented shifting friendships, competition for success and conflict with teachers.³⁴ Much of her social life was shared with friends, with whom she visited the picture house and swapped novels. She mentions her enjoyment of *Picturegoer*, with its emphasis on romance and Hollywood-style glamour.³⁵ Indeed, sketches of film stars on the back of her Latin exam paper in 1941 are testimony to this influence, as is the bolero, the garment made popular by Deanna Durbin, that she knitted for herself.³⁶ Her favourite song of the same year, 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', came from the 1935 film adaptation of *Roberta* and starred *Picturegoers* regulars Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. While Norah's particular demographic group - scholarship girls from poor but self-educated socialist families - are neglected in the historiography on interwar youth culture,³⁷ the cultural repertoire of films and magazines which shaped schoolgirl interests towards a broad interest in feminine beauty, romance and glamour – termed 'heterotopia' by Penny Tinkler - is visible in her diaries.³⁸

Norah's diaries further reveal a general preoccupation with boys and sexual matters. While her practice in her 1938 diary of dedicating one of the blank memoranda pages to her 'crazes' throughout that year is not repeated, Norah's diaries from early 1941 reveal her crushes on and flirtatious encounters with boys. These include, for example, a local boy (24 February 1941: 'Saw Jock in Barroon. Nearly fainted, we both stammered & smiled. Fools!') and a nameless 'Tec boy' whom she and a friend followed into Loughborough the day they broke up for Easter:

3rd April: 'Tec boys broke up. I have a bad crush on 'someone'!

4th April: Broke up. Peggy & I stayed in Loughborough to see 'someone'.

Went in Boleworth's for a snack on 1/6. Three soldiers made eyes at us all the time!³⁹

Norah noted her appreciation of film star Lew Ayres and flirted with an airman based at Castle Donington aerodrome and whom she nicknamed 'Wasp':

8th September 1841: Ma & I went to Derby in morning. Bought white frock material & stamp album. Went to pictures at Derby with Rich. I have a crush on Lew Ayres. I'm pretty certain my 'Wasp' is billeted with Sowers.

While her correspondence with Jim the sailor developed from the socks that she knitted for the war effort, her communications with him and her accounts of these exchanges within her diaries need to be understood in the context of her membership of an emotional community of schoolgirls.

It is possible, however, that the 'emotional communities' model may benefit from a greater sense of conflict and difference.⁴⁰ Norah's school, for example, aimed to control the behaviour of the girls and to regulate their displays of emotion through rules, punishments and teachers' comments. This is revealed in Norah's diaries when she is reprimanded for looking 'ponderous' at a time of a crush. Mary Belton, a class mate of Norah's, suggests that there was a direct relationship between school repression - to the extent of putting on separate buses for girls and boys who attended the Grammar School next door - and schoolgirl giddiness, making a return for a Saturday morning detention quite attractive as the boys were in school at that time.⁴¹ Thus, when Norah received her first letter from her sailor correspondent in February 1941, she would have been called into the Head Teacher's Office to be given the letter alongside a stern warning from Miss Bristol to be sure to tell her mother.⁴² The spatial dimension of Norah's flirtations with boys - on the school bus,

in a cafe after school, but reprimanded in school itself – suggests that people inhabited different emotional communities that were sometimes in conflict and that they move between them as they move between life situations, adjusting their emotional expression accordingly.⁴³

While Norah Hodgkinson's diaries are certainly 'chronicles of the everyday', they did more than help the diarist to order her days but were significant in the creation of a new self as a modern girl. Amidst the extensive reportage of school days, domestic chores, ailments, family happenings and weather, it is romance, sex and love which are accorded the most expansive entries. We can track the development of Norah's emotional responses to letters from Jim the sailor, which began in caution but were soon a focus of pleasure and anticipation. Her second letter from him in March 1941 was 'unexpected' and included a gift of a cap-band which, she wrote, 'I thought was grand'. A few weeks later, following an exchange of personal information, Jim's letter was 'long awaited' and Norah was clearly delighted that he enclosed 'Two beautiful snaps of him & one of brother in RAF'. After receiving a photograph of Norah, Jim's next letter addressed her as 'Dearest Dimples'. On 13th April 1941, she wrote: 'Received a rather romantic letter from Jim. Called me "dearest dimples"'. Jan Plamper 's definition of emotions as 'always embedded in gestures and words, ... always ... expressed in some way – written out, uttered, marked by cries, demonstrated via bodily writhings or stiff upper lips, and so on'⁴⁴ does not quite work for the ordinary diary. We cannot know if Norah dashed into the kitchen to show her mother the cap-band, or how excitedly she conveyed details of Jim's letters on the school bus the following morning, but her words nonetheless signify emotion.

Norah's responses when Jim's letters temporarily cease at the end of April 1941 suggest her diary provided a space for emotional experimentation:

29th April. Still no letter. ON 6 & 9 NEWS THAT H.M.S ELGIN HAD BROUGHT DOWN HEINKEL III. OH JIM! Went about in a trance. Heard cuckoo.

30th April. Returned to school. Still no news so had a good old weep. Mock Oxford on May 8th & Practical Domestic Science on May 26th.

1st May: Had Hygiene instead of Music Appreciation. Oh, Jim where have you got to?

2nd May: Rolled tennis court. 48,000 British troops evacuated from Greece. Wonder whether Jim is there. If he doesn't write soon I'll go mad. Had clothes inspection.⁴⁵

While Norah's use of capital letters and exclamation marks serve to highlight her feelings of anxiety and shock, the mention of her dramatic trance-like state, weeping and especially the inclusion of the word 'Oh' - *Oh, Jim where have you got to?*- suggests that she is performing romance. While some of this will have been expressed in a public arena – at home or at school – Norah's record of such emotion in her diary suggests that this was also a performance to herself. In this respect, her diary entries can be seen to perform similar work to the posters of pop-stars which formed an important part of girls' bedroom culture in the 1960s and 1970s and which Angela McRobbie argued, provided a safe space in which they could 'try out' new romantic emotions.⁴⁶ Jim, aboard his minesweeper in the Atlantic, was at a safe distance. But he was a real man, not a pin-up, and their exchanges allow for a new relationship to emerge: in her diaries (although, significantly, not in her letters to him⁴⁷) Jim becomes 'my sweetie', my 'beloved':

20th June: Received a letter from my sweetie. He's going home. Hope he's not ill because I've got it pretty bad on him.

When Jim's letters fail to arrive again, Norah picks up the phrase written across his first letter and which was to become a wartime catchphrase.

1st August: Ma went to Derby. I do hope my dearest beloved is alright. Maybe I will receive a letter soon, anyhow, I must keep 'Smilin thro'.⁴⁸

Despite their terse and disjointed quality, not to mention the comedic quality conveyed by her use of parataxis, Norah Hodgkinson's entries in her 1941 *Spratt's Game Foods Diary* were nonetheless expressive of emotion. More than this, the focus on her feelings about her romantic encounters is suggestive of a belief in the importance of emotion as part of her self-construction as a modern girl. The next section of the article explores such emotions within the specific context of wartime to engage with discussions concerning the lived experience of wartime cultural directives.

Gender, sexuality and emotion in wartime Britain

Historians of Britain during the Second World War have explored the contradictions and contestations surrounding gendered notions of the good citizen. Philomena Goodman, Lucy Noakes and Sonya Rose in particular, have all been attentive to the significance of sexuality in relation to the discourse of 'patriotic femininity'. The war necessitated upheaval in terms of the gender order, they argue, but while women were to move into the workforce, they were to recognise that their working role was temporary, that they were expected to continue with domestic and other nurturing roles, especially if they were mothers, and they were to remain feminine and attractive whilst refraining from overtly sexual behaviour. Thus, propaganda, film and women's magazines all urged women to be fashionable and glamorous in order to boost morale and counter fears of the manliness of women working in male trades, while simultaneously cautioning against their being too attractive. While the expression of male sexual desire was good for morale, 'libidinal femininity' was problematic on a number of fronts: the 'promiscuous' woman destabilised war work and the gender order, she potentially was lost to war work through pregnancy and care of a baby, and the anxiety she inspired among absent men could constitute a threat to the war effort itself.⁴⁹ Thus young women who flirted with soldiers easily came too close to irresponsibility and 'moral laxity'.⁵⁰ Women's entry into new spaces such as pubs and the workplace could be both liberating and oppressive, in that they were exposed them to a new kind of moral policing which focused heavily on sexuality.⁵¹ Women's sexual propriety was seen as essential to national stability, charges of sexual promiscuity could undercut good citizenship, leading women to risk becoming perceived as 'self-absorbed pleasure seekers' and ultimately, 'internal others'.⁵²

While evidence of the existence of such cultural directives is plentiful, it is less easy to track women's responses to these contradictory discourses during the war itself. Sonya Rose's argument that 'a popular culture that linked sex and love and valorised romance' mitigated against such discourses and that women were more responsive to it than to attempts to rein in their sexual and romantic inclinations is convincing.⁵³ Letters written between women welders in Sheffield and collected by Margaretta Jolly also reveal extensive romantic and sexual activity,⁵⁴ while novels written in the

aftermath of the Blitz⁵⁵ or oral historical testimonies tell of 'strategies of resistance as well as submission'.⁵⁶

However, whether women's resistance to moral purity efforts included resistance to a 'definition of citizenship that excluded carnal pleasure and passionate desire' as Rose argues, is perhaps more questionable. More recently, James Hinton has urged for the adoption of a more nuanced interpretation, arguing that the behaviour of two of the Mass Observation diarists he studied in *Nine Wartime Lives* - Lillian Rodgers' enjoyment of 'flying her kite' and the self-questioning of Gertrude Glover in her response to evidence of 'promiscuity' – suggest that historians should resist a tendency to 'elide stylized public exhortatory discourse with the actual mentalities of real people'. Even people who expressed anxiety about the behaviour of young women, such as Glover, saw 'good-time girls' not as an internal other, but as 'a deviant part of "us" who needed to be reclaimed and protected'.⁵⁷

While Norah Hodgkinson did not transgress into spaces previously defined as male – her low-grade clerical work at a railway office would have been open to her before the war, for example - her diaries nonetheless reveal the 'heightened sense of heterosexuality' at this time.⁵⁸ The following diary entries were made in the second week of Norah's working life and exactly one month after her first meeting with Danny, Jim's airman brother, which marked the beginning of their relationship. It is notable in this excerpt (as elsewhere) that Norah does not include details of her work in her diary. Her focus in these entries (which include a Wednesday half day and a 'spiv' Saturday), is men and the war:

9th October 1941: Poured with rain all day. Colin Briers came on leave & said it was all around his camp that I worked at Derby.

10th: Ma came to Derby, so had lunch together at Boots. Saw Naval Officer like Danny.

11th: Missed train at dinner time by going down town, so arrived home at about 2 o'clock. Terribly disappointed because my Danny didn't write.

13th: Posted letter to Kathleen. No letter from my Danny Boy. Hundreds of WAAF on Platform 1. Made friends with boys in Night Office. Very foggy.

14th: Received letter from Jim & Trent pass. Where is my Danny?

Interruptions during news. Terrific battle for Moscow.

Norah mentions on two occasions that she was the subject of conversation by soldiers in camps. Here, neighbour Colin Briers had reported that her arrival in Derby had caused a stir. (Later, after her brother Frank had joined up and was at an army camp in Oldham, his attractive younger sister was a topic of conversation.⁵⁹) In addition, Norah sees a naval officer who reminds her of Danny, she notes the WAAFs at Derby railway station, begins a flirtation with the boys in the Night Office, records the arrival of letters from Danny and Jim, and refers to the backdrop of the war itself in the battle for Moscow which interrupted the BBC news. Both war and romance are central to her life.

Much of Norah's and Danny's relationship between September 1941 when they met and October 1943 when he disappeared for the first time comprised the usual stuff of courtship. War or no war, they may have written to each other, taken romantic walks, kissed and canoodled and made plans for their future together. But the context of the war enabled new and different contact between men and women, in Norah's case through sock-knitting and encounters with soldiers and later airmen who were stationed in the village where she lived.⁶⁰ It became fashionable to have a soldier or airman boyfriend. Although she did not attend many of the dances which formed the entertainment for the soldiers based at Donington Park, these were the focus of huge excitement among the local girls.⁶¹ The first of the two professional photographs Norah had taken was in response to requests by Jim. 'I hope you will find me a snap of you', he wrote, 'for my writing box looks rather bare without a girl's photo.'⁶² The memory of WW1 and the terrible loss of men leading to many women remaining single and childless, helped to shape a feeling of urgency; having a boyfriend in the Forces also engendered a feeling of permanence and stability.⁶³ This was the case even if, as in Norah's case, she was never quite sure when Danny was going to visit. Sometimes he slipped out of camp to come to Castle Donington for the night; on other occasions, his leave passed and he did not appear. Their enforced separation added to her sense of longing and made letters and the telegrams even more special; in turn, these fostered a particular intensity.⁶⁴ Danny's wartime role – an airman, training to be a pilot – added pride and anxiety.⁶⁵ When he came to stay – in April and September 1942, January, April and (three separate weekends in) September 1943 - the short amount of time they had available to them

made for intense times. These concerns are evident in the following excerpt written following Danny's visit of Easter 1942:

11th April 1942. Received a letter from my Danny. He's definitely coming today. D came about 8 o'clock & I fell all over again. Stayed up til 1 o'clock. Kissed me goodnight beautifully.

12th: Danny & I went over Daleacre in morning & down to the Trent at night. Mum told him all my secrets. He said he'd kiss me every time I said 'yes' & carried it out about 8 times. I love the way he kisses & him too.⁶⁶

Norah was uncertain that he would arrive until he actually turned up on the doorstep. They walked together (over Daleacre, a local beauty spot, and down by the River Trent). Her focus is his kisses and her feelings of being in love. A fortnight later, Danny passed through Derby on his way to a Tank Course in Yorkshire '& so I met him. I'm absolutely crazy about him & it was grand to see him.'⁶⁷ Norah's choice of language in her reportage of this relationship throughout the summer of 1942 makes clear her emotional involvement with Danny:

20th June 1942. Received a letter from my love. I'm absolutely crazy about him honestly & truly.

22nd June. Posted my sweetie-pie's letter.

29th June: Received an absolutely glorious letter from my sweetheart.

9th July: Received a spiffing letter from my love.

5th September: Received a letter from my Danny & a grand photo of him. Went into raptures about it. Had minor bust up with Mrs Harris.

6th: Wrote to my love.

31st October: Received a glorious letter from my sweetheart, he's been home to Jim, I love him terribly. He wants to know what age I want to marry.

22nd November: Uncle Maurice & Auntie Jeannie came. I love Danny terribly.

This time next week ... (D.V.)

Amidst all of her telegraphic diary entries, Norah's mention of Danny is frequent, expansive and the focus of emotion.

While Norah's excitement is clear, the most difficult subject to explore in her diary concerns their sexual relationship. From the beginning of their relationship, Norah's diary entries reveal the extent of her sexual naivety, the role of Danny in educating

her in sexual matters and her feeling that it was inappropriate to name some of this even in her private diary. The following excerpts concern Danny's visit to Castle Donington in January 1943, when Norah had booked tickets for the pantomime:

23rd January 1943. My sweet did arrive last night, rang me up from Hemington & dashed home & went to meet him. He's adorable. Went to the pantomime & it was grand. Had a really wicked night kiss. Left me a terrible 'love mark' etc.

24. Danny told me a thing or two about things such as ...? He's going to ask me when I will marry him when I'm eighteen. He went back on the 6pm to London.

25. I've never been so miserable in all my life now my love has gone away. Told Mrs Harris something that shocked the office.

We cannot know whether it was one of these snippets of information imparted by the older, experienced boyfriend that shocked the office, or whether Norah revealed the fact of her love bite. Either way, the suggestion is that Norah was trying out a new persona, keen to leave behind the innocent school leaver and emerge as a worldly, sophisticated young woman. The extent of her naivety is made clear in subsequent entries. Later in 1943, for example, when her friend Connie rather enthusiastically acquired two copies of a book on birth control and gave one of them to her, Norah was stunned. 'Oh boy, what a book!!!' she wrote in her diary. 'What diagrams!!!'⁶⁸ As Hera Cook has argued, very many women were completely ignorant about how babies were made (and born) in the 1940s.⁶⁹ In July 1943, when Norah welcomed the onset of her period with the customary tick on the relevant page of her diary, she wrote the words 'Thank God'. Usually a clockwork twenty-eight days, she was six days late. But she had not seen Danny for two months, and clearly believed that a pregnancy could still occur, despite having a period in between. Moreover, they had not actually had full intercourse (a fact revealed by Danny's later requests to her to 'give in' on his next visit.⁷⁰) Clearly Norah believed that kissing and canoodling could leave her pregnant.

Cook's argument that the physical manifestations of attraction and desire, and the possibility that sex could be a source of pleasure, were unknown to many, probably most, women, is not quite accurate for Norah. Her diaries reveal self-consciousness, ignorance, the terrible threat of pregnancy, a need to be sure that Danny was

sincere, but also other emotions, including desire. When Danny came to visit in September 1943, Norah was unequivocal about the pleasure of their sexual relationship:

4th September 1943: Danny came. He's adorable.

5th: Things got hot with Danny in bed in the morning.

11th.. My dearest one came. Had a beautiful time.

12th: Had a beautiful time in bed with my cherub. Went a walk in the afternoon. I do love him so dearly.

This greater willingness to sneak into bed with Danny was in the context of their steady, loving correspondence throughout the summer of 1943. Danny had sent Norah gifts - a packet of farm butter from Devon, some Scottish heather – with his long and loving letters. He had called her his 'little passion flower' and suggested they plan to go away together during his next leave. Norah was preparing for this when she bought a golden girdle and some padded material to make a matching dressing gown.⁷¹ Norah was feeling glamorous – she was delighted when a member of the extended family told her she looked like Deanna Durbin in August 1943 – as well as confident and loved. She borrowed from the library a book on Eastbourne, Danny's home town and the place where he had been offered a teaching job as a PE master after the war, and noted that she had seen a beautiful engagement ring in Smith's in Derby.⁷² As William Reddy has argued, in the interwar years in America, 'Men began to focus on how far a woman would let them go; women, on how to tell if his feelings were sincere.'⁷³ Norah's diary entries throughout the summer and autumn of 1943 suggest that she believed Danny to be sincere.

Norah had not arrived at this position without a struggle, however. There is plentiful evidence in her diaries of terrible disappointment and even anger when Danny's sincerity was in doubt. Occasionally, she was upset by his failure to arrive on a visit when he had indicated that he could get away from his camp⁷⁴, or by his 'disappointing' letters. 'I think I'll have to quit him', she wrote on 1st April 1942, and on 1st June after receiving another scrappy letter, she reported that she 'Felt awfully mad but sent fairly decent letter back'. 'I think I hate him', she wrote on 14th October 1942, adding that the next day was 'just about the miserablest day of my life, because Danny and I are nearly quits.' These entries reveal that Norah expected something more than the short notes she sometimes received from Danny. This is

suggested when, after the 'lousy' letter that led to the outburst in October 1942, Danny wrote and 'asked what age I want to marry.' This was a 'glorious letter from my sweetheart'. Norah's expectation was marriage and she noted the local girls who became engaged to or married their Forces' sweethearts.

Norah's entry about managing to send 'a fairly decent' reply to Danny reveals that she generally concealed her upset and raises interesting questions about the expression of anger, by women generally and specifically in wartime.⁷⁵ This is illuminated by Norah's response after receiving a 'lousy little postcard from Eastbourne, which I promptly tore up' in May 1943. Over the next few days, Norah wrote in her diary:

9th May: Dear God what have I done to make Danny like this and please bring him safely back to me. British captured 20,000 of enemy. Had tea with my new Crown Derby tea service. Made scones.

11th May: Received rotten little letter from Danny. He's at Eastbourne. Replied to him and posted it at 2.15pm. It ought to shake him up a bit.

While Norah does not reveal what she said to Danny in her attempt to make him buck his ideas up, she is clearly angry that he was treating her so casually. She soon regretted her actions, however:

12th May: I love my Danny terribly and I am sorry I sent that letter. Please God let him take it the right way and come back to me.

Danny was aware of his failings and on this occasion wrote to Norah to ask for her forgiveness.⁷⁶

When Danny disappeared in October 1943, however, Norah adopted a different tactic which normalised his behaviour in terms of the extraordinary circumstances of wartime. At that point, their relationship seemed very solid. Danny had been to visit three times during September and had written three letters in that very week. Suddenly, however, his letters sopped. Norah was initially upset and confused and decided to take the only available action, writing to Danny's mother and picking up her faltering correspondence with Jim. In the face of no information from either source, Norah switched from anger to patriotic femininity. Lucy Noakes has discussed the frequency with which a romantic narrative involving soldiers appeared in women's magazines. She quotes from *Woman's Own* in 1940: 'how many of our

greatest love stories depend on suspense, on temporary disappointment and frustration before fulfilment?' and 'separation only serves to deepen their love, and every letter strengthens it.'⁷⁷ Norah had rehearsed this role in the summer of 1941 when, a few weeks into her correspondence with Jim, service prevented him from replying and when she drew upon the trope of 'smilin' thro'.⁷⁸ In late 1943 and throughout 1944, Norah recast herself as a waiting woman. Her 1944 diary became a prayer for Danny, as every day she beseeched God to ensure his safe return.⁷⁹ In the meantime, she continued to collect for her bottom drawer and had a new and even more glamorous photograph taken to send to Danny. Waiting became part of the romance. After Danny resumed correspondence in March 1945, Norah extended the role of the waiting and supportive girlfriend, sending him newspapers and a dictionary while he was in Norway and following the news of demobilisation avidly. However, after Danny's last visit in November 1945 and his final disappearance, Norah waited over Christmas and New Year, and then from 1st January 1946, made no further mention of Danny. Her 1946 diary was used not to confess her emotions, but as a tool to manage her emotions and exert self control.⁸⁰

This exploration of Norah Hodgkinson's pocket diaries contests the neglect of ordinary writing and non-elite diaries within the historiography and challenges us to see within such writing not just the rhythms of everyday life but evidence of emotion which was central to the process of creating and nurturing the modern self.⁸¹ As Tomhave Blauvelt argues, '[y]oung women [diarists] performed on a broad stage... their performances had political, economic, social and ideological meaning'.⁸² While Norah's diaries were undoubtedly written only for herself, their engagement with national and international events invites us to interrogate the boundaries between the public and the private and to explore her reception of and engagement with public narratives about gendered wartime expectations. Very few sources offer access to the interior emotional lives of working class girls in England in the 1930s and 1940s. When valued as ordinary writing, the pocket diary begins to do just that.

¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Vol.I. *The History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969); Febvre, Lucien. “Sensibility and history: how to reconstitute the emotional life of the past” in *A New Kind of History: from the Writings of Febvre*, edited by Peter Burke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); Peter N. Stearns and Carol Zisowitz Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the history of emotions and emotional standards’, *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 813-836; P. Stearns and C. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America’s History* (NY: New York University Press, 1986); *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press 1994); *American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety* (NY: Routledge, 2006); Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying About Emotions in History’, *The American Historical Review* 107:3 (2002), pp. 821-845; Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); William Reddy, ‘Historical research on the self and emotions’, *Emotion Review* 1:4 (2009), 302-315; J. Plamper, ‘The history of emotions: An interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein and Peter Stearns’, *History and Theory* 49 (2010), 237-265. For a diverse range of recent approaches to the history of emotion, see for example: Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: the Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); P. Burke, ‘Is There a Cultural History of the Emotions?’ in Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills (eds), *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 35-47; C. Wouters, *Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (London: Sage, 2007); Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History - Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011); Benno Gammeril (ed.), ‘Emotional styles – concepts and challenges’, special issue of *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 16:2 (2012), 161-317. For studies of specific emotions and emotion and power, see: for example: Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2006); N. Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); S. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of*

Feeling: shaping the religious emotions in early modern Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

² Susan J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out', *Emotion Review* 3:1 (2011), 117-124, pp. 120-121

³ For an excellent overview of scholarship, see Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart*, Introduction.

⁴ An exception to this is the middle and upper working class contributors to the Mass Observation project, although describing these as 'ordinary' is problematic in itself. See Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), pp. 75-80; Claire Langhamer and Ian Gazeley, 'Happiness in Mass Observation's Bolton', *History Workshop Journal*, 75 (2013), 159-189.

⁵ Wouters discusses class in relation to changing 'regimes of manners and emotions' during the twentieth century, using conduct books, magazine articles rather than evidence in personal diaries. Wouters, *Informalisation*, p. 173, *passim*.

⁶ The phrase comes from Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984).

⁷ Irina Paperno, 'What Can Be Done with Diaries?', *Russian Review* 63:4(2004), p. 571; Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). See also: Philippe Lejeune, 'The Practice of the Private Journal: Chronicle of an Investigation (1986-1998), in *On Diary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), pp. 184-211; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁸ James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 5.

⁹ Exceptions to this are from the US and focus on the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. See for example: Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Marilyn Ferris Motz, 'Folk Expression of Time and Place: Nineteenth-Century Midwestern Rural Diaries', *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (April-June 1987), 137-47; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage, 1990); Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, *The Work*

of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion 1780-1830 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); and Molly McCarthy, 'A Pocketful of Days: Pocket Diaries and Daily Record Keeping among Nineteenth-Century New England Women', *The New England Quarterly* 73:2 (June 2000), 274-296 and *The Accidental Diarist: A History of the Daily Planner in America* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter, *Revelations: Diaries of Women* (Random House, 1974), pp. 3-4.

¹¹ Jennifer Sinor, *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray's Diary*, (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2002), pp. 4-5. For discussion of absence of frames through which to evaluate the ordinary, see Sarah Edwards, 'Edith Holden: an extraordinary lady? The vexed debate about the "diary of a nobody"', *Life Writing* 2:1 (2007), 41-66.

¹² Penny Summerfield, 'Historians and the Diary: smoothing the rough texture of everyday life', unpublished paper given at Social History conference, April 2013. See also in Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (eds), *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 1; Rachael Langford and Russell West (eds), *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms: Diaries in European Literature and History* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 1999).

¹³ Langhamer, *The English in Love*; Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*.

¹⁴ Ulrich quoted in Dorothy C Wertz, *Lying In* (1977), p. 9.

¹⁵ McCarthy, *The Accidental Diarist*, p. 8.

¹⁶ Norah Hodgkinson's diaries and letters from Jim the sailor are currently in my possession but are in the process of digitisation and will be made public in the future.

¹⁷ Here I dissent from the consensus in diary studies that authors of private diaries always had 'a clear sense of audience'. Suzanne L. Bunkers, "'Faithful Friend": Nineteenth-Century Midwestern American Women's Unpublished Diaries', *Women's Studies International Forum* 10:1 (1987), 7-17, p. 8. See also Lynn Bloom, "'I write for myself and strangers': Private Diaries as Public Documents', in Bunkers and Huff (eds), *Inscribing the Daily*, pp. 23-26.

¹⁸ Sinor, *Extraordinary Work*, pp. 5-9, 15-22.

¹⁹ Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 9.

²⁰ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*.

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- ²¹ Michael Roper, 'Slipping Out Of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 57- 72.
- ²² Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart*, pp. 3, 9. See also Gammeril, 'Emotional styles – concepts and challenges',. For emotionology, see Stearns and Stearns, 'Emotionology'.
- ²³ Philomena Goodman, "'Patriotic Femininity": Women's Morals and Men's Morale During the Second World War, *Gender & History* 10:2 (1998), 278-293, p. 278.
- ²⁴ Sinor, *Extraordinary Writing*, pp. 5-9, 15-22.
- ²⁵ Norah Hodgkinson's *Spratt's Game Foods Diary*, January 1941.
- ²⁶ Motz has argued that the ordinary diary is more akin to folk art than to literary diaries: 'the effect is not the narrative flow of sentences and paragraphs, but a symmetry born from the repetition and juxtaposition of similar but slightly varied units'. Motz, 'Folk Expression of Time and Place', p. 140.
- ²⁷ Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers", p. 25, quoting Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, p. 8.
- ²⁸ Sinor, *Extraordinary Writing*, p. 13.
- ²⁹ For women writing themselves into history, see Carol Acton, "'Stepping into history": reading the Second World War through Irish women's diaries', *Irish Studies Review* 18.1 (1010), 39-56.
- ³⁰ Norah Hodgkinson's *Charles Letts's Schoolgirls' diaries*, 7th April 1938, 7 June 1938, 19th August 1939, 'Films Seen', 1939.
- ³¹ Norah Hodgkinson's *Spratt's Game Foods Diary*, 26th March 1941, 29th March 1941.
- ³² Rosenwein quoted in Plamper, 'The history of emotions' 49, 237-265, p. 253.
- ³³ Barbara H Rosenwein, 'Worrying About Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107: 3 (2002), 821-845, p. 842.
- ³⁴ Norah Hodgkinson's diaries, 1938, 1939, 1941.
- ³⁵ For concerns about the role of cinema and romance magazines in encouraging an unhealthy preoccupation with the opposite sex, see Penny Tinkler, 'Cause for Concern: young women and leisure, 1930-50', *Women's History Review* 12:2 (2003), 233-262, p. 245. See also Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood cinema and female spectatorship* (London, 1994), 56–59.

³⁶ 1st, 3rd, 12th November 1939; Latin examination paper in Norah Hodgkinson's papers, currently in author's possession.

³⁷ For an overview of the literature, see Selina Todd, 'Flappers and Factory Lads: Youth and Youth Culture in Interwar Britain', *History Compass* 4:4 (2006), 715-730.

³⁸ Penny Tinkler, *Constructing Girlhood: popular magazines for girls growing up in England, 1920-1950* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1995). See also Langhamer, *The English in Love*, p. 36.

³⁹ 24 February 1941; 3-4 April 1941.

⁴⁰ See Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have a History?) A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012) 193-220, pp. 216-217

⁴¹ Interview with Mary Belton, Leicester, 4 June 2011.

⁴² Interview, Mary Belton.

⁴³ See also Gammerl, 'Emotional Styles'.

⁴⁴ Plamper, 'The history of emotions', p. 258

⁴⁵ 29 April-2 May 1941.

⁴⁶ Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

⁴⁷ I know this because Jim spends an extraordinary amount of time in his letters trying to persuade Norah to reveal her feelings about their correspondence. Letters from Jim, in my possession.

⁴⁸ 20th June 1941, 1st August 1941.

⁴⁹ Philomena Goodman, *Women, Sexuality and War* (Palgrave, 2002); Noakes, *War and the British*; Sonya Rose, *Whose Peoples War?* See also: Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (eds), *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). The phrase 'libidinal femininity' is from Rose.

⁵⁰ Rose, *Whose Peoples War?*, chapter 3.

⁵¹ Philomena Goodman, "Patriotic Femininity".

⁵² Rose, *Which Peoples War?* pp. 73, 91-2. For the role of women's magazines in urging emotional control, see Janice Winship, 'Women's magazines: times of war

and management of the self in *Woman's Own*, in Gledhill and Swanson (eds), *Nationalising Femininity*, 127-139.

⁵³ Rose, *Which Peoples War?* pp. 25, 91.

⁵⁴ Margaretta Jolly, *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (London: Scarlett Press, 1988).

⁵⁵ See for example Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*; Mary Wesley, *The Camomile Lawn*. See Lara Fiegel, *The Love Charm of Bombs: Restless Lives in the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁵⁶ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 138-143.

⁵⁷ Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives*, pp. 119, 128-31, 63.

⁵⁸ Goodman, 'Patriotic Femininity', p. 278.

⁵⁹ Norah's diary, 8th August 1942.

⁶⁰ For the role of the war in destabilising courtship patterns and practices, see Langhamer, *The English in Love*, pp. 116-18, 145, 166-68.

⁶¹ Interview with Kath Jones, August 2011.

⁶² Letters from Jim, 12th April 1941, also May 1941 (nd), 17th June 1941.

⁶³ See Barbara Friedman, *From the Battlefield to the Bridal Suite: Media Coverage of British War Brides, 1941-1946* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

⁶⁴ Jolly, *Dear Laughing Motorbyke*.

⁶⁵ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁶ 11th-12th April 1942.

⁶⁷ 29th April 1942.

⁶⁸ 26th May 1943.

⁶⁹ Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex and Contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 167-186.

⁷⁰ 25th March 1945.

⁷¹ 23rd June 1943, 22nd July 1943, 6th August 1943, 13th August 1943.

⁷² 22nd July 1943, 12th August 1943.

⁷³ Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', p. 310.

⁷⁴ 26 September 1942. Started my holiday. Frank came for the weekend. My sweetheart didn't come so cried my heart out. Eileen Souter was engaged. Oct 3.

Frank, Rich, Pop & I went to watch Derby v Stoke. Lost 1.0. Felt very mad with everyone in general.

⁷⁵ For diaries and anger, see Blauvelt *The Work of the Heart*, For gender, anger and changing 'emotional cultures', see Peter Stearns, 'Girls, Boys and Emotions: Redefinitions and Historical Change', *Journal of American History* 80:1 (June 1993), 36-74..

⁷⁶ 24th May 1943, 1 June 1943.

⁷⁷ Noakes, *War and the British*, p. 69.

⁷⁸ 23rd May 1941: My last letter to Jim returned saying 'No Trace'. Wonder what has happened. Must keep 'Smilin Thro". 1st August: Ma went to Derby. I do hope my dearest beloved is alright. Maybe I will receive a letter soon, anyhow, I must keep 'Smilin thro".

⁷⁹ Lynn Bloom, 'The Diary as Popular History', *Journal of Popular Culture* 9:4 (1976); Clara Milburn wrote her diary in WW2 to keep faith that her POW son would return home. See Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, pp. 71-74.

⁸⁰ Stearns, *American Cool* (1994) and Stearns, *Battleground of Desire: the Struggle for Self-Control in Modern America* (1999). See also Wouters, *Informalization* (2007)

⁸¹ See Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind* (2006)

⁸² Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart*, p. 184.