

**Fashioning Identity:**  
**Helen Eustis' Construction and Presentation**  
**of the Female Self in *Harper's Bazaar*, 1947-52**

by

Julie Kuljurgis

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Dedicated to the portions of myself I could not have understood without undertaking this project,  
and to the regions of myself I can only begin to explore after the thesis deadline.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the theory and presentation of female identity in Helen Eustis' publications in *Harper's Bazaar* from 1947 to 1952. Eustis redefines female identity by placing its locus at the intersection of the internal, intellectual, and psychological. With this emphasis on the female mind, Eustis' perspective encourages women to question the construction of their identity as a way to maximize their independence. Eustis avoids simplicity and embraces complexity, recognizing that her imagined characters are not reducible to stereotype or plot convention in much the same way that titles such as wife, mother, and author are misnomers of her own multi-faceted personality.

My analysis begins by considering magazine fiction as a valuable cultural and literary source, focusing specifically on the combination of Eustis and *Harper's Bazaar* as offering a particularly insightful view into contemporary discourse on female identity of the 1950s. Though Eustis has had a diverse and critically significant career, both her name and work remain relatively unknown and the first chapter of the thesis is therefore dedicated to her literary history, reception, and impact.

In her essays, Eustis explores personal concerns about losing her sense of self and strives to create viable solutions for retaining her identity. The second chapter explores Eustis' literary methods for exploring the psychological. Eustis defines the intangible and employs brief moments of flash-characterization of the "everywoman" in order to clearly convey her theories on female identity. Eustis creates the terms "disinterested love" and "split personality" to describe how a woman can dedicate portions of herself to loved ones while still maintaining a private, core sense of self.

Eustis' three works of fiction provide another forum through which she can tease out the complexities of female identity. The third chapter considers how working within the defined genre of fiction allows Eustis to elaborate on the concepts of "disinterested love" and "split personality." I argue that the anxiety and unhappiness suffered by two of Eustis' characters are direct extensions of their failure to conceive of an independent identity for themselves. The only female character Eustis creates who actually achieves a proper balance of "disinterested love" is a secondary character whose balance of independence and dependence is reflected through the point of view of her husband.

SHORT TITLES

*Captains*: ---. "The Captains And The Kings Depart." *Harper's Bazaar*. Oct. 1947: 204-05, 267-68, 270, 272, 274, 279-80, 282, 284-85.

*HSIGO*: ---. "How Shall I Grow Old?" *Harper's Bazaar*. Sept. 1949: 172-73, 253-54.

*Split Personality*: ---. "How to Enjoy a Split Personality." *Harper's Bazaar*. Feb. 1950: 135, 180-81.

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**INTRODUCTION:  
RE-COMPLICATING THE OVERLY SIMPLIFIED**

The image evoked by the term “1950s woman” or “1950s housewife” consists of a cinched waist, full skirt, flawless makeup, and impeccable hair. Though this portrait of a woman was painted roughly half a century ago, representations of this female ideal remain present and prevalent in modern popular film and television. For example, the films *Pleasantville* (1998) and *The Stepford Wives* (2004) revisit the 1950s housewife as a theme.<sup>1</sup> The title of the current popular television series, *Desperate Housewives* (2004-), playfully references the notion of women trapped in suburbia.<sup>2</sup> The allure of the 1950s woman, even in contemporary social consciousness, is relatively easy to understand: rooted in simplicity and surface value, the stereotype is not anchored in the woman herself but in the implications derived by her presence. She is comfort and reliability, holding no secrets and making her family her foremost concern. She is at once emblematic of the 1950s as a decade and a reduction, even a distortion, of it, showcasing a façade of stability that refuses to address any hint of discontent or complexity.

For me, one of the most personally intriguing depictions of the 1950s woman created during the era itself is Grace Kelly’s character Lisa Fremont in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1954 film *Rear Window*. Lisa is visually stunning, glamorous from head to toe, and if judged only on her appearance, it might appear that she is restricted to a one-dimensional icon of female beauty and

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<sup>1</sup> *Pleasantville* transports modern characters into the simplified universe of a 1950s sitcom of the same name, saturated with proud bread-winning husbands and prim wives. A remake of the 1975 film, *The Stepford Wives* (2004) portrays a disturbing modern community in which husbands aggressively seek to transform their wives into robotic emulations of the 1950s housewife stereotype: content never to leave the house, happy completing chores in torturously high heels, and satisfied with fulfilling their husband’s every whim.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Carter, “‘Desperate Housewives’ Stirs ABC’s Comeback Hopes,” *The New York Times*, (5 Oct. 2004), 11 Mar. 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/05/business/media/05tube.html?ex=1206349887&ei=1&en=b5ead620564de389>.

domesticity. However, Lisa is remarkably different from the stock 1950s housewife character: she has a successful career as editor of a fashion magazine, and in addition to her impeccable style, she is intelligent. She visibly towers over Jimmy Stewart's character L.B. Jeffries in his wheelchair, gives critical input into Jeffries' murder investigation, and boldly risks her own safety by breaking into the suspect's apartment. Lisa is gorgeous, fashionable, and nurturing of Jeffries while remaining independent, witty, and aggressive. As a fashion editor, Lisa helps create the image of womanhood she displays on screen, yet puzzlingly falls short of fully attaining it. Her combination of beauty and intelligence is simultaneously a godsend and a curse; for most of the movie Jeffries is opposed to marrying her: "She's too perfect, she's too talented, she's too beautiful, she's too sophisticated, she's too everything but what I want."<sup>3</sup> Lisa faces an intriguing paradox of being too good and therefore not good enough in the eyes of the man she loves.

Lisa attempts to fit in to Jeffries' rugged lifestyle as a traveling photojournalist, and the final scene shows Lisa in more casual clothes reading a book on the Himalayas. After being sure Jeffries is fully asleep during a nap, Lisa puts down the book and picks up an issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. This gesture shows Lisa's continued passion and interest in fashion, and while it accentuates her cosmopolitan interests, it also resonates as an icon of her personality because it is what she chooses to read during a private moment. What, if anything, could an investigation into the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* elucidate about the charismatic Lisa and her struggle?

Many scholars have used magazines as sources for historical studies. For my purposes, the most relevant example of such an analysis can be found in Betty Friedan's influential book *The Feminine Mystique*, in which a large portion of her research focuses on fiction published in

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<sup>3</sup> *Rear Window*, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Perf. Jimmy Stewart, Grace Kelly, DVD, Paramount, 1954.

women's magazines.<sup>4</sup> Friedan discusses the literature in women's magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, but neglects to include the fiction from *Harper's Bazaar* or other high fashion magazines in her survey. Furthermore, much of Friedan's argument is that the feminine image created or propagated in magazines is largely achieved by publishing stories with similar plots and featuring female characters who not only have the iconic physical traits of the 50s, but who also achieve happiness through marriage. Friedan's argument cannot explain the presence of Lisa Fremont, who is the ideal image of the feminine mystique but simultaneously falls short of it in her inability to marry Jeffries. Lisa's choice of magazine at the end of the film is no coincidence—as I will show, *Harper's Bazaar* offers Lisa a unique and innovative way to think about herself.

During the 1950s, the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* contained fashion spreads, blurbs on social activity, travel destinations, and featured pieces of fiction. The fact that *Harper's Bazaar* is first and foremost a fashion magazine should not discredit the caliber of content it published. The *Bazaar's* editor-in-chief, Carmel Snow, deliberately made thought-provoking literature a staple of the magazine. As Snow's former employer and *Harper Bazaar's* main competitor, *Vogue* refused to publish fiction. Snow reflects on how her mindset differed from the rest of *Vogue's* editorial staff: "Though our business as a fashion magazine was to show fashion, our business as journalists, it seemed to me, was to make an exciting book. That point of view wasn't often accepted at *Vogue*."<sup>5</sup> The contents of *Harper's Bazaar* suggest that the woman

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<sup>4</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963). Friedan peers through the lens of periodical fiction aimed at women in an attempt to understand how female identity was reflected and shaped after World War II through the early 1960s. Friedan points to the changing plotlines in magazines. Much of her emphasis is on the shift of female protagonists from active career women who are committed to themselves in the 1930s to more passive protagonists whose aspirations are limited to marriage and childbearing in the 50s. Friedan did not claim that these magazine stories alone created an unattainable female ideal. Instead, she valued them as a unique resource in analyzing cultural attitudes about women in the post-war era.

<sup>5</sup> Carmel Snow with Mary Louise Aswell, *The World of Carmel Snow*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), 50. Hereafter cited in the text. Snow's departure from *Vogue* to *Harper's Bazaar* was considered a slap in the face to

reading it will have a critical eye not only for tasteful clothing and accessories, but also for sophisticated high literary quality. In her autobiography, Snow explicitly makes a connection between fashion and intelligence: “That our readers should be well-dressed women *with well dressed minds* was my ambition as the editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*” (172). *Harper’s Bazaar* was not simply a magazine to promote consumer consumption of fashion trends. The magazine did not peddle static ideas of fashion or femininity, but sought to provide and create innovative perspectives in both fashion and literature.

I was therefore drawn to *Harper’s Bazaar* for its complexity and acknowledgment that fashion and intellect are not mutually exclusive. In reading issues from the era, I focused on the discourse of female identity in the post-war period from 1947 through the beginning of the 1950s<sup>6</sup> and was astounded by the many complex and richly suggestive texts I discovered. Much of the fiction in *Harper’s Bazaar* portrayed women who were largely disillusioned or discontented with their lives, regardless of their marital or social status. Single female characters were devastated by their inability to find lasting, meaningful relationships.<sup>7</sup> Even fiction featuring married women ranged from content but confused wife questioning the origins and sustainability of love<sup>8</sup> to a young wife so bitterly resentful of her overbearing husband that she attempts to push him off a cliff.<sup>9</sup> Divorced characters were frequently featured as well, and the

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much of the staff at *Vogue*, and it offended Snow’s employer and friend Conde Nast so deeply that he never spoke to her again.

<sup>6</sup> My initial ambition for this project was to analyze the fiction in *Harper’s Bazaar* in its entirety from 1947-1963 in order to encompass the length of time commonly associated with the 1950s. However, with each issue containing at least two fiction pieces of varying lengths, the total amount of reading required only for the fiction features would have been roughly 500 stories and thousands of pages. I realized that the scope of this initial plan was far too great for an undergraduate thesis and I would not be able to investigate the entire era, nor every story printed throughout. I did read the issues from 1947-55 in their entirety, and through that process discovered Helen Eustis’ work. After making her my primary focus, I only referenced issues during the rest of the era to see if her work appeared.

<sup>7</sup> The stories “The Old Maid,” by Mary Pratt Cable and “Amour Amour” by Marjorie Sharp both appeared in the Oct. 1951 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar*.

<sup>8</sup> Marjorie Farber, “Do You Love Me?” *Harper’s Bazaar*, (Aug. 1947): 104-105, 180.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick O’Brien, “Samphire,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, (Mar. 1953): 176, 205.

portrayals varied in their presentations from young divorcees attempting their relationship again to an affluent divorced woman bored with her life.<sup>10</sup> *Harper's Bazaar* was not only publishing stories with neat, polished storylines that glorified the happy housewife image in the same way that Friedan asserts many women's magazines did. *Harper's Bazaar* invested in complicated fiction and complicated characters who did not shy away from the unpleasant aspects of life.

Of the authors who published in *Harper's Bazaar* during the beginning of the decade, the sharpest and most socially conscious voice belongs to Helen Eustis. Eustis did not have a section of the magazine's literary features dedicated specifically for her, but she was one of the few authors to have repeat features in the magazine. Eustis contributed to the high level of quality fiction in the *Bazaar* with seven essays and three pieces of fiction. Unlike other contributors' pieces, Eustis' multiple works vary from pieces clearly defined as stories to essays that have no such delineation but straddle the line between empirical non-fiction and fiction. Even in her most serious essays, Eustis often creates a hypothetical character or discusses herself in a way that requires her to create a fictional representation of herself. In effect, she constructs a psychological model for a hypothetical "everywoman" in America.<sup>11</sup>

Using Eustis' fiction in *Harper's Bazaar* as a lens through which we can explore the representations, limits, and possibilities of female identity is a worthwhile endeavor because it enables us to escape the common, reductive understanding of the period. My analysis will not treat the fictional representations of women as fact, or as applicable to all women in America. Eustis wrote for an audience similar to herself: white, mid-to upper class, and heterosexual. Nonetheless, Eustis' work in *Harper's Bazaar* is a rich and careful synthesis of opinion, theory,

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<sup>10</sup> Isabel Bolton, "A Drive in the Fog," *Harper's Bazaar*, (June 1947): 119, 148-152.

<sup>11</sup> I have initially placed this term in quotes because my use of it is in contrast of the "everyman," since Eustis is a woman writing to an intended audience of women about female identity. For the rest of the thesis, the term will not be in quotes.

and fiction that allows for insightful scrutiny of the construction and perception of female identity. Eustis is an important and valuable figure to remember and consider because she discusses the confines of her own identity, and female identity in general, while imagining the vast and innumerable ways to expand it. My emphasis on Eustis investigates her theories of female identity, how her complicated characters demonstrate various failings in achieving personal identity, and the importance of Eustis' psychological attempt to define female identity as a value of intellect and mental capacity.

**CHAPTER ONE:  
REDISCOVERING HELEN EUSTIS**

Helen Eustis remains largely overlooked in the broad literary landscape. Most of her acknowledgement and praise is contained within the genre of murder mystery and detective fiction: “[Eustis] helped to introduce to crime fiction a new quality of realism and sophistication in the portrayal of both the villain and the victim—the guilty and the innocent—which foreshadowed the development of the psychological plot.”<sup>12</sup> Eustis’ most significant literary contribution is her clever, deft, and unique incorporation of psychology into her work, providing complex character development. Criticism of her novels and stories acknowledges her talent and unique perspective, but fails to mention her contribution to *Harper’s Bazaar*. I will be exploring how Eustis uses her knowledge of psychology in her essays and fiction to question and explore the confines female identity, arriving at the conclusion that the core of female identity is located within a woman’s mind.

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1916, Eustis’ biographical information includes a strong sense of motivation, independence, and success. Eustis studied at Smith College in Massachusetts and graduated with a B.A. in 1938 (Rahn 582). Eustis completed some graduate work at Columbia University in New York City but did not obtain an advanced degree. Eustis’ areas of study include literature and psychology,<sup>13</sup> and much of her critical praise lauds her fusion of these disciplines. Both of Eustis’ marriages ended in divorce, and she had only one son with her first husband (Rahn 57). During her literary career, Eustis produced two novels, a

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<sup>12</sup> B.J. Rahn, “Helen Eustis,” *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction*, vol. 2, Ed. Frank N. Magill, (New Jersey: Salem, 1988): 578. Hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Rahn’s information about Eustis does not state that she completed any work or study in psychology. However, the “Editor’s Guest Book” of the Jul. 1952 issue of *Harper’s Bazaar* that featured Eustis’ piece “The Return to Love” reads, “Miss Eustis had some advanced work in psychology at Columbia” (16).

collection of short stories, translated three French novels into English,<sup>14</sup> and turned her story “Mr. Death and the Redheaded Woman” into a children’s book in 1983.

Eustis’ first and most popular novel, *The Horizontal Man*, received an Edgar Allen Poe award in 1947 and is regarded as “a tour de force rivaling Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*” (Rahn 578). What makes the novel especially powerful is Eustis’ “complex psychological portrait” of the murderer, which creates “a disturbing yet compassionate picture of a tortured soul whose tragic suffering is caused by what [Eustis] calls ‘the poetry of unreason’” (Rahn 581). Eustis combines the psychological and the literary to create a thriller that is focused on understanding the realities of character complexity, “distinguishing the novel from the category of merely clever pastiches of detective story devices.”<sup>15</sup> Contemporary reviews of the novel took note of Eustis’ deft character construction. The 1946 *The New York Times* review states: “It is through [her characters] that the atmosphere of tragedy and fear is created; and it is through them that the book acquires an extra dimension, transcending mere entertainment.”<sup>16</sup> Even a more skeptical review from the *New Yorker* that considers Eustis’ use of psychology to be “textbook” nonetheless considers the novel to be “an interesting first try” and acknowledges Eustis’ “keen eye for character.”<sup>17</sup>

Almost a decade after *The Horizontal Man*, Eustis published her second novel, *The Fool Killer*, in 1954. Though it was less popular, it was adapted to film in 1965. Eustis centers the narrative around a psychological investigation into her main character, twelve year-old George

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<sup>14</sup> Eustis translated *Cats Don’t Care for Money* by Christiane Rochefort in 1965, roughly a decade after her second novel. Her other translations are *To Forget Palermo* by Edmonde Charles-Roux in 1968, and *When I Was Old* by Georges Simenon in 1971.

<sup>15</sup> Joanne Harack Hayne, *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Ed. Lesley Henderson, (Chicago: St. James Press, 1991), 354. Hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>16</sup> H. R. Rays, “Comedy of Manner—And Murder—In A Campus Setting,” *The New York Times*, (Mar. 31 1946): 125.

<sup>17</sup> “Book Reviews: Mystery and Crime” *The New Yorker*, (March 30, 1946): 96.



Mellish, as an intentional “Homage to Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.”<sup>18</sup> Whereas *The Horizontal Man* was influential in its technique, thereby impacting an entire genre, *The Fool Killer* is important its pointed attempt to revisit a popular and canonized text with a new psychological perspective. Once again, *The New Yorker* was negative in its 1954 review. Anthony West regards the novel’s tone as one of “gooey sentimentality” that tells the story about “relations between a not very bright little boy and a homicidal maniac” (120). West considers Eustis’ attempt to revisit Tom and Huck as a failure, viewing Huck as “the lineal descendant of the Arcadian shepherd ... possessed of uncorrupted virtue,” and declaring that “Miss Eustis’ child hero is no kinsman of Huck,” describing George as “pseudo-tough” and “lachrymose” (121). Contrasting West’s dismissal of the novel is a glowing *The New York Times* review from the same year in which Hal Burland declares *The Fool Killer* to be “timeless” and praises Eustis’ talent in “never missing a scrap of color or character,” arguing that the book “deserves to live a long time.”<sup>19</sup> Burland is captivated by George, calling him “Huck Finn prematurely mature ... a character to know and remember” (BR5). Burland makes the case that Eustis is a respectable literary figure, embracing her talent and success in creating a character on par with the culturally beloved creations of Twain.

West’s disapproval is strongly contested in Stuart L. Burns’ 1970 scholarly article in *Western American Literature*, in which Burns defends George as representing a modern psychological middle ground between Huck and Tom. For Burns, George seeks “security that resides somewhere between tyranny and anarchy”<sup>20</sup> and battles through complex psychological struggles associated with adolescence. In comparing Eustis to Mark Twain, Burns states that she

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony West, “Books: Arcadia Run To Seed,” *The New Yorker*, (20 Mar. 1954): 120. Hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Hal Burland, “The Beautiful and Brutal,” *The New York Times*, (7 Feb. 1954): BR5. Hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart L. Burns, “St. Petersburg Re-Visited: Helen Eustis and Mark Twain,” *Western American Literature*, vol. 5 (Summer 1970): 103. Hereafter cited in the text.

“faces squarely the fact that Mark Twain hinted at but backed away from: that there can be no escape from society” (111). Burns’ evaluation of Eustis’ novel in comparison to Twain argues a critical viewpoint similar to my own: that Eustis is an interesting type of author who “merits our serious attention” (112).

Eustis’ novels demonstrate her impact as an author who helped shape genre fiction as well as critically and successfully revisited the canonized creations of Mark Twain. Eustis’ ability as a writer, as highlighted in the popular and critical reception of her novels, is crucial in considering her work for *Harper’s Bazaar*. Just as Eustis “depicts [the characters in *The Horizontal Man*] in various states of anxiety ranging from the normal through the highly neurotic to the psychotic” (Rahn 578), so does she successfully depict herself and her characters in *Harper’s Bazaar*. At the heart of her pieces is the same creative character construction and psychoanalysis that won her praise for *The Horizontal Man*, only she focuses on the difficult psychological conditions of herself and her perceived idea of the average American woman. In doing so, Eustis blurs the literary definitions that distinguish essay from fiction, establishes a connection with her reader, and embarks on an exploration of female identity.

*Harper’s Bazaar* did not have regular columns or sections dedicated to specific authors, though the magazine did occasionally feature multiple works from various authors. Ten of Eustis’ pieces appeared between 1947-52, making her a prominent voice in the magazine. Eustis is unique among the contributors to *Harper’s Bazaar* published because of the frequency of her publications and due to the fact that she wrote a combination of essay and fiction. Only the pieces from her 1949 collection of short stories are clearly delineated as such in the table of contents. Eustis’ essays have no such delineation, and though they are told in a first person narrative, they contain within them a characterized version of Eustis herself. Her essays range in

topic, discussing a host of post-war anxieties: a society relying more on science and rationale than human emotion, a pressure for increased efficiency and therefore a constant sense of urgency and hurry,<sup>21</sup> and as the focus of this thesis, the constructs and boundaries of female identity. Eustis' essays and fiction, if read together, allow for extended meditation on the nature of female identity. Eustis blends self-narration, social commentary, psychology, and fiction in order to both define and explore female identity. Her combination of literary technique and infusion of a psychological perspective imbues her work with a richness that helps her address her topic with the appropriate complexity required.

The psychological intricacies teased out in Eustis' work are insights through which we can access the social climate of the 1950s. Analyzing the problematic situations that both Eustis and her characters battle through prevents us from accepting a reductive understanding of the era. The behavior of Eustis' characters and her portrayal of herself are not to be taken as indisputable fact of female life at the time, but a reflection of female attitudes towards the self. Proving whether or not all women suffered identity crises or neurosis is not the issue in this thesis. My analysis focuses on Eustis' literary construction of her own mind and the minds of her characters, which both attempt to tackle core issues of female identity, namely how a woman is supposed to divide herself between the public and private spheres.

Of Eustis' seven essays in the *Bazaar*, I will explore the two that focus entirely on issues of female identity, tracing Eustis' technique in addressing each problem and exploring the implications of her solutions. In analyzing her three pieces of fiction, I will demonstrate how the character flaws Eustis creates for two of her characters relate to her theories and exploration of

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<sup>21</sup> In "The Book Fed Baby" (Nov. 1948), Eustis warns parents against being overly clinical in childrearing. "What's Your Hurry?" (May 1949) traces the physical and emotional costs of perpetually attempting to complete tasks with increasing efficiency. "It's Smart to be Gloomy" (July 1949) advocates moderate skepticism but warns against being obviously optimistic or unyieldingly pessimistic.

identity put forth in her essays. Eustis makes a point to present two women who are deeply unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives. I argue that their unhappiness stems from failed attempts to locate their identity externally instead of internally. In contrast to their loss of self, Eustis also features a female character who successfully maintains an independent identity.

**CHAPTER TWO:  
RECONSIDERING FEMALE SENSE OF SELF**

Eustis invites her reader on a self-reflective journey in her two principle essays on female identity, “How Shall I Grow Old?” and “How to Enjoy a Split Personality.” Eustis’ employs her knowledge of the psychological differently in these essays than in her novels. Knowing her pieces would be published in a monthly periodical, aimed at a specific population of women, and limited to a strict number of pages, Eustis uses a psychological perspective to quickly connect with her reader and tackle issues of her own identity.

Eustis’ technique works because she cleverly and subtly embarks on discourse that is centered in the female mind without being overly clinical, scientific, or academic. The foundation of each essay is Eustis’ reference to her own life experiences. Through this personal recapitulation, Eustis analyzes the implications of her own mind. Her essays are essentially creative non-fiction in which she extrapolates lessons from her own life and projects them onto her reader.

Eustis’ first task in her essays is to make the topic of the female mind and identity approachable and manageable to her reader. Eustis successfully does this through a technique of naming a problem, giving it boundaries, and planning a method for its solution. Both titles, “How Shall I Grow Old?” and “How to Enjoy a Split Personality” suggest that each essay will present the reader with an answer or instructions. Eustis successfully answers the “how” of each work with neatly phrased theories of her own: “disinterested love” and “split personality,” respectively. Eustis herself does not combine her theories of disinterested love and split personality. However, if read together, the marriage of split personality with disinterested love creates a two-part theory of identity that alerts the female reader to the location of identity within

her own mind, advocating a purposeful retention of individuality. Eustis takes the broad and intangible domain of the female mind, and through her use of first-person narration and creative non-fiction, proposes psychological solutions in literary terms.

### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OLD AGE

“How Shall I Grow Old?”<sup>22</sup> appeared in the September 1949 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. Eustis initially conceptualizes “Old Age” as a “country” that is “a desolate place” (172). Eustis names and defines the intangible notion of aging that is really a psychological fear. What Eustis perceives to be most troublesome about Old Age is its debilitating effect on the self: “Only the self is real, but the self is sadly stripped” (172). Once the feared results of aging have been initially described, Eustis utilizes her first person narrative to make the broad topic of old age specific and relevant to herself. Eustis states that “spiritual or psychological dependency” (172) is what she fears most about growing old. Eustis’ admittance of her own personal fears serves to soften her authorial voice and include the reader immediately into her thought process. With this introduction and specification of her problem, Eustis is able to delve deeper into a portrayal of her own mind.

In specifying the origins of her fear, Eustis places the problem of old age entirely within the realm of the psychological. Eustis clarifies her fear as turning into a woman who “attach[es] herself parasitically to the young ... droning endless grievances into unwilling ears” (172). Eustis does not fear physical dependency, but emotional and intellectual dependency. Eustis deduces that the unattractive qualities she seeks to avoid in old age are present throughout life but “become more conspicuous under the circumstances of the later years of life” (173). Eustis

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<sup>22</sup> Helen Eustis, “How Shall I Grow Old?” *Harper's Bazaar*, (Sept. 1949). Hereafter referred to as *HSIGO* and cited in the text.

thusly changes the emphasis of age from being quantified by years to an assessment of an individual's "quality of being" (173). By asserting that one does not automatically change after living an arbitrary number of years, Eustis successfully takes a concept commonly associated with outer appearance and makes it an internal issue of mental maneuvering. This viewpoint is quite sophisticated because Eustis completely removes the actual physical process of aging from impacting a woman's sense of self.

With the transition of aging from the physical to the psychological quality of being, Eustis states that the way to successfully maintain a sense of self at present and throughout the aging process is rooted in levels of interest:

So long as she is alive she is capable of interest; in the moment that she is able to feel interest she becomes interesting. When she is interesting she can no longer be merely dependent, for she gives pleasure, she has a place in the world ... She must be both interested and disinterested, never uninterested. (253)

Eustis is once more emphasizing the idea that a woman's identity is independent of her age. A woman's actual age does not determine her ability to be interesting—she is theoretically always able to maintain the part of her that contains wit and passion. The danger of losing one's self stems from a void of feeling, from being "uninterested." Eustis is therefore associating a loss of identity with a loss of the ability or desire to be mentally engaged.

Eustis creates and classifies the term "disinterested love" as the optimal emotional and psychological state a woman should possess:

The only power she has ever really had in her life has been the strength of her disinterested love and her acceptance of the independence and integrity of those she has loved. And this acceptance must be based on a kind of disinterested love of herself, and respect for her own integrity. (253)

Disinterested love is an emotional and psychological state of balance in which a woman is able to recognize impulses caused by her love, but is also disciplined enough to refrain from allowing these impulses to consume her. In maintaining a sense of independence, a woman is still able to support the people in her life that she cares about, therefore extending her sphere of influence from her internal self to external manifestations in others. Disinterested love is not complete without this mutual enrichment.

In order to make her concept more relatable, Eustis imagines instances in which she presumes women have already practiced disinterested love. In doing so, Eustis takes advantage of her position as author, creating mini-stories about a hypothetical everywoman to demonstrate her psychological theory. The first example Eustis cites is of motherhood: “The first time her son wobbled down the road on his bicycle, how she wanted to go with him, or forbid him to go! Yet if she loved him she kept her place and watched him move away” (253). Eustis is valuing and valorizing the moment of restraint a mother must feel when raising her child and emphasizing her necessary separation from him.

Eustis also uses this flash-characterization of the everywoman to demonstrate disinterested love in the realm of marriage: “When her husband made business judgments that seemed to her risky, she had to learn to state her opinion without exerting pressure in a matter which was not, finally, in her hands” (253). By stating that the woman “had to learn” how to manage her emotions, Eustis presents the process of disinterested love as a mental discipline.



While the example contains a level of sexism in its acceptance that financial matters are not part of the imagined woman's business, Eustis is not advocating a role of subservient housewife. Instead, she is intelligently recognizing the tension between a woman's inner desires and her awareness of societal expectations and attempting to construct an intelligent, rational, and empowering synthesis of the two.

Eustis therefore takes an amorphous and undefined concept such as "Old Age" and gives it boundaries. Her message to her readers is that aging is not something to be feared but something to be embraced, and it is a process that does not have to change them fundamentally. They can still be the engaging women they are today. Disinterested love elevates the woman's mind over her body: physical appearance or even physical ability is not as imperative as intellectual ability and mental perception of self. However, the effectiveness of disinterested love depends entirely on the individual female's practice of it. Disinterested love is a skill, and though it stems from a woman's innate ability to feel interest, it must be sparked and consciously fanned by a woman to be effective. Eustis sets her psychological self-examination up in a way as to be inviting and explanatory to the reader, but ultimately leaves the responsibility of reaching disinterested love in the hands of her reader. Eustis is endowing her reader with a sense of independence and agency, and by defining old age as a threat that can ideally be controlled and conquered, she is suggesting that the female mind can stay just as young, sharp, and engaging as it is today.

### SPLIT PERSONALITY AS CONTROLLABLE MINI-SELVES

Eustis addresses the issue of reconciling her identity as a woman in her February 1950 essay “How to Enjoy a Split Personality.”<sup>23</sup> Eustis does not use split personality in a strictly psychological way to diagnose a condition. Instead, she uses split personality as an overarching theme to describe the multiple titles and obligations a woman has at any given time. Her treatment of split personality is positive in that she promotes division of identity as a useful way to manage the demands of everyday life, juxtaposing split personality as a welcome alternative to becoming consumed or dominated by a singular personality. Eustis does not ignore the complications of identity, nor does she suggest that all women have flawless marriages and keep perfect households. The recognition, acceptance, and employment of split personality is Eustis’ proposed method to allow a woman to successfully manage the separate social spheres of her life. *Split Personality* expands on Eustis’ ideas in *HSIGO*, but instead of characterizing the everywoman, Eustis directly invites her reader to embark on the same psychological journey she goes on.

Eustis begins by reflecting upon the various dimensions of herself: “I have never really thought of myself—of my *self*—as Helen Eustis ... because it never seemed to me that myself was homogeneous enough to be called by any single name. Whose is?” (135). Eustis makes considering what constitutes her identity appealing through framing the essay as a personal journey. This is where Eustis blends the format between essay and fiction, as the Helen Eustis to whom Eustis herself refers is an imagined persona who serves as an example for her readers. The process Eustis describes as well as the Helen Eustis she explores is a fictional characterization of herself.

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<sup>23</sup> Helen Eustis, “How to Enjoy a Split Personality?” *Harper’s Bazaar*, (Feb. 1950). Hereafter referred to as *Split Personality* and cited in the text.

Eustis expands the scope of *Split Personality* to her reader:

Look into your mirror. Look into your own eyes. Look a long time. Can you dismiss what you see there as merely Jane Jones or Mary Smith? Does any name at all satisfy you as descriptive of all that you see at the bottom of your own gaze? (135)

Eustis utilizes a gaze that is personal, private, and removed from the community of family or friends to debunk the notion that a woman's identity is fully contained and accurately described in the handful of syllables that comprise her name. Furthermore, Eustis is framing her argument in a way that does not allow for reader disagreement. How can an anonymous reader, after following Eustis' suggestion to evaluate herself, honestly answer that her depth and complexities end with her name? The unspoken answer—that there is undeniably more to a woman than her reflection or name—is empowering and creates a rhetorical justification for Eustis' further analysis of the female self.

Though Eustis asserts that there is no name to accurately define her, she nonetheless attempts to designate a vast notion of herself with the “elastic name of Me,” metaphysically describing “Me” as an “uncharted sea” with both unexplored and explored territories, “all of whom co-exist—though not always peaceably” (135). Eustis uses the language of exploration and discovery to make the partitioning of self possible. Similar to her description of the land of “Old Age” in *HSIGO*, Eustis creates boundaries for the difficult topic she attempts to control.

Eustis gives examples from her own life to illustrate split personality. Eustis herself is donning the everywoman role in *Split Personality*, listing factions of herself she assumes her reader will relate to. The first division of self that Eustis describes is her “Party Personality” that she obtained in order to help her maneuver dances and social situations successfully (135). Her

first example of split personality, therefore, is not a wholly separate self but merely a faction of her overall united self. Most importantly, the split in personality is directly related to the social setting she is in, suggesting that the female self is fluid, moldable, adaptable. Additionally, Eustis presents the female self as a chameleon with the ability and agency to recognize which personality best fits her varying surroundings: “[the] intellectual personality, chatty neighborhood gossip personality ... a personality which emerges after the second cocktail ... a personality which eats up boy-meets-girl plots, and another which only reads tomes in small print” (180). Eustis presents a personality gamut ranging from serious to light-hearted, creating a spectrum that is broad, appealing, and inclusive of her reader. Eustis acknowledges these changing personalities fit specific situations and concludes that none of the above splits in personality are vast enough to be regarded as herself; instead, she views them as “outposts studded over the big, amorphous sea on which [her] consciousness sails, seeking for a homeland” (180).

Eustis then shifts her focus to an attempt to find the division of her self that is largest and therefore most able to provide her with a sense of oneness. Of the several personas listed, the few that Eustis chooses to elaborate on are those of mother, wife, and a complicated personal self that is separate from outside influences. Similar to *HSIGO*, the areas of personality Eustis focuses on are those of mother and wife. However, Eustis also includes a portion of her mind that she imagines exists only for herself and for the sake of efficiency.

Eustis first explores the persona of “Mommy,” recognizing that the title alone is too vague to encompass the many facets of motherhood (135). There is the “large, forceful woman” (135) who is an arbiter and authority figure; the mother “distinctly retarded at about nine-year-old level” (135) who always wants to play; and the mother who serves as the comforter and

nurturer in the case of “stomach-ache or a fall from an apple tree” (180). Eustis is very perceptive in noting that these variations are again contingent on setting, and therefore the real shift that must occur within the mother is a mental shift. Eustis likens the role of parenthood to one that can be “played according to known stage directions” (180), suggesting that the motherhood is, in part, a performance of expected behavior and a discipline to be learned. This performance requires mental and psychological focus, because while a woman is being a mother she is simultaneously playing countless other roles.

Eustis is also quite clear in pointing out that though a mother’s personality is always tied to her child, she cannot make that her sole identity. Eustis relays this to the reader by stating that this is a lesson she has learned from her son’s actions towards her as he non-verbally communicates: ““You must be yourself if you are to be my mother. You must be independent of me if I am ever to be a whole human being, independent of you”” (180). Therefore, the healthiest relationship between a mother and her child is one in which both mother and child are able to retain a separate sense of self. A mother’s independence does not only benefit her, but also benefits her child. This passage is a more articulate expansion of the idea of disinterested love. Eustis’ example of remaining independent while still being a mother is crucial not only for herself but for the child, for the *other* who is influenced by her.

Eustis further elaborates on the necessity for independence within the realm of marriage, asserting that “to live as one imagines another sees one is to remove oneself doubly from reality, disappointing not only oneself, but the other” (180). Eustis’ point here is once more an elaboration in disinterested love. Eustis is clearly pointing out that if one attempts to find the root of one’s identity externally, both parties will be harmed. It is crucial that an equal balance be maintained, so that each partner “must feel their own wants and express them, even when the

wants are in conflict” (180). Eustis is pointedly debunking the idea that marriage means a shared identity or consciousness and suggesting that retaining one’s independence is the most crucial way to sustain a romantic relationship. Therefore, the healthiest marriage will result from the preservation of separate identities, not an amalgamation of two or an attempt to create one identity out of two people.

Eustis explores an area of herself in *Split Personality* that she does not discuss in *HSIGO*. Eustis considers the uncharted portion of herself that the print name Helen Eustis belongs to, a persona representative of her authorial and mysteriously independent separate self. Eustis describes how strange it is to see her own name in print and how that Helen Eustis “must be *someone*, after all, and if she was someone, then who? What kind of person?” (180). In exploring who this other fraction of herself might be, Eustis finds it to be a personality of independence and reason. The independent Helen Eustis is “excellent in emergencies,” encouraging Eustis to change her own flat tire instead of asking someone else to do it (180). This Helen Eustis is a persona of “usefulness,” always suggesting the solution to problems when Eustis’ “natural reaction was to cry, ‘Oh dear, what shall I do?’” (180). Her efficiency and sense of togetherness is such that Eustis wishes to be more like her. In her attempt to do so, Eustis notes that “I must have been beginning to understand the part and play it successfully, or I would not, then have become so frightened” (180). What frightens Eustis about her efficient and independent self is that she would become so cut off from others and so focused on herself as to become cold and detached. Ultimately, what causes the efficient Helen Eustis personality to return to a small fragment of personality is the thought of what she would do if “someone were to offer love” (180), an emotion that efficient Helen Eustis is incapable of feeling. Just as giving away part of one’s personality to fit the expectations of a spouse or giving away too much of

one's self in the name of love is damaging to identity, so is resisting love and personal contact to an extreme.

Eustis concludes that in order to maintain a solid sense of self, she must “remain in close touch with Me, with all its garbled diversity intact, its wretched habit of being one person today and another tomorrow” (181). *Split Personality* presents the reader with a method of achieving the sense of integrity that is cited in *HSIGO* as a source of disinterested love. Once again, Eustis' emphasis is on the agency and ability of herself and her female reader. The theory of split personality is once again only as successful as the woman practicing it. The battle in acknowledging and negotiating different forms of the female self is contingent on the mental capacity and discipline of each individual woman.

These essays elucidate important features of Eustis' work while simultaneously providing insightful perspective into the era. Firstly, the essays demonstrate Eustis' ability to fluidly combine the literary with the psychological as she uses literary techniques of defining the intangible and the construction of the everywoman to perform her analysis of female identity. Additionally, she maneuvers between the genres of essay and fiction, and her first person narrative is both a biographical account and a guise of authenticity, producing a powerful, captivating, and influential analysis of herself to her imagined female audience.

Most important is Eustis' placement of female identity in the control of her reader. In both *HSIGO* and *Split Personality*, Eustis pinpoints the location of female identity and personality in the mind, and at the discretion of each individual woman. Eustis stresses that in order for a woman to construct and maintain a healthy and functioning sense of self, she must retain a delicate distance between herself and her loved ones. Eustis' essays present a discourse on female identity that is neither simplified nor reductive, but rather empowering for women.

The crucial perspective on female identity that Eustis puts forth in both essays is the location of identity as wholly psychological, interactive, and controllable by every single woman. Eustis recognizes the reciprocity of identity and personality: a woman must necessarily be involved with others in order to function in any sort of society or social setting and create a personality for herself. However, Eustis emphasizes the need for maintaining an independent sense of self who will not compromise her personal integrity.

While Eustis' essays present a positive and empowering notion of female identity, they contain within them the implication that a woman can fail to achieve the tenets of disinterested love and split personality. Eustis has clearly framed *HSIGO* and *Split Personality* as guides to help her female reader achieve a healthy notion of self that is balanced between the internal and external because they are thoughtful and successful journeys into her own mind. What Eustis demonstrates in the next chapter with the characters in her fiction pieces is how the source of a woman's deep-seeded unhappiness stems from her inability to embrace and explore herself.



**CHAPTER THREE:  
RE-EXAMINING SOURCES OF DISCONTENT**

Eustis' stories in *Harper's Bazaar* were also published in Eustis' 1949 collection, *The Captains And The Kings Depart And Other Stories*. Eustis' stories "are not, generically, mysteries, but they are informed by an almost gothic interest in human psychology and motivation" (Hayne 354). The aim of this chapter is to relate the unhappiness that plagues Eustis' female characters to their inability to reconcile their identity. Namely, their discontent is rooted in the disparity between the life they believe they should be living and their actual lives.

Eustis' troubled women are discussed in Nona Balakian's 1949 *The New York Times* review of her collection. Balakian first touches on the same talent that critics will later praise and anthologize Eustis for: "her manner is that of an urbane writer, interested in those hidden facets of relationships which are the actual source of dramatic action."<sup>24</sup> After acknowledging the power in Eustis' craft, Balakian takes issue with the portrayal of the characters: "In [Eustis'] gallery of characters—most of whom are women—there is barely one who seems capable of realizing a lasting, normal relationship ... they are essentially women without men" (BR6). The fact that most of Eustis' characters are women is especially germane to my analysis of female identity. Balakian notes:

Eustis takes more than a clinical interest in her characters. They are pitiable both for themselves and as examples of a common failure of our times: the inability of modern woman to find a satisfying substitute for the doll's house from which she fled. (BR6)

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<sup>24</sup> Nona Balakian, "Gallery of Women," *The New York Times*, (Sept. 25, 1949): BR6. Hereafter cited in the text.

Balakian acknowledges Eustis' deft use of psychology, stressing that it expands beyond mere recapitulation of a condition and touches more deeply on the heart of problems and the complications of the female mind. Though Balakian states that Eustis' characters are experiencing a common failure, she does not elaborate on the way Eustis portrays the origin of their failures. What this section will demonstrate is that Balakian cannot touch upon is how Eustis' characters' flaws are rooted in their inability to attain any balance of disinterested love or sense of self.

The critique I argue against is Balakian's statement that Eustis' "women without men" are "unpromising subjects to illustrate the complexities of human association" and that Eustis' stories "would have been twice as effective if ... she had included the example of one *real* woman" (BR6). There is nothing within Eustis's stories to suggest her characters are *not* real. Eustis compiles very complex portraits of her characters, and what makes them most human is the fact that they are flawed, discontented, and unable to find lasting relationships. The first two female characters analyzed teeter on the cusp of depression and nervous breakdown, and Eustis does not gloss over their problems with simplicity but rather graces them with intricate detail into the root of their unhappiness. Furthermore, Eustis does, in fact, include an example of a woman who is by Balakian's definition *real*—a loving, competent, and emotionally stable woman.

Eustis herself does not make explicit connection between her essays and her fiction. However, if read in dialogue with them, Eustis' fiction is concerned with similar issues of female found in *HSIGO* and *Split Personality*. Through the literary genre of fiction, Eustis employs narrative perspectives that trace the thoughts of her troubled female characters in order to elucidate the ways in which they fail to create and maintain identity. It is also through Eustis'

use of a male perspective that Eustis is able to portray a woman who successfully employs disinterested love and split personality.

#### **FAR FROM THE PERFECT HONEYMOON**

*Harper's Bazaar* published "Honeymoon" in February 1949, a story in which Eustis dives into the mind of a newlywed wife, exploring her mental psychological anxiety throughout her honeymoon. Eustis presents the source of her unhappiness in her forfeiture of her former independent lifestyle. In abandoning her old life, the wife loses her sense of self entirely as she erroneously attempts to root her identity in her husband. Eustis skillfully and delicately portrays the wife's lack of disinterested love as she loses any sense of separation between herself and her husband.

Eustis gives the reader a clear picture of the wife's former life in New York after graduating college. The wife had a "good deal of confidence, had found a job writing jacket copy for a publishing firm ... she had felt herself to be marvelously strong!"<sup>25</sup> The wife was young, ambitious, and functioning extremely well as such. In the immediate years after college, the wife had obtained and maximized the one quality Eustis prizes most in *HSIGO*: the ability to be interesting. She had an intellectual coterie of people "whose ideas blissfully paralleled her own—and they liked her!" (189). Furthermore, her independent city lifestyle did not prevent others from finding romantic interest in her. Several men "seemed to admire her intellect, and consider it no barrier to sexual activity. They fell for her" (189). The wife thinks back on her life before her husband quite fondly, but still considers meeting him to be the apex of her life. She views her life before him as a period of waiting, "She did not name what it was she was

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<sup>25</sup> Helen Eustis, "Honeymoon," *Harper's Bazaar*, (Feb. 1949): 133. Hereafter cited in the text.

waiting for, but she knew” (189). Eustis purposely frames the wife’s memory in terms of her husband in order to demonstrate how she has made him the most important figure in her life.

Eustis places the wife’s memories at the beginning of the story in order to make a pointed contrast between the wife’s single life and married life. Unlike her single experience, the wife is consumed by the overwhelming feeling that “nobody paid any attention to her. [Her husband], after all, was a published author ... she had not yet caught the hang of being graceful and wifely over what she could not help regarding as invasions of their privacy” (189). Eustis pointedly states that the wife has not “caught the hang” of marriage yet. This connects to Eustis’ essays in which she presents both disinterested love and split personality as a type of mental discipline that takes practice. Eustis further presents the wife’s change in lifestyle as the wife reflects, “as his joy had brightened, hers had dimmed. It was as if they had had a common bank account of enthusiasm; the more he drew upon it, the less was left for her” (189). Eustis is demonstrating how the wife is unable to differentiate her own emotions from that of her husband; her feelings are contingent upon his. Eustis gives a clear example of the effect of the wife’s married life on her mental and psychological state by presenting her in a state of depression:

She felt that in Mexico being a woman was like being nothing at all. The men she passed looked right through her, and no one seemed to want to talk to her.

Sometimes, in the morning, she lay on the bed and wept instead of writing because she felt so nothing-at-all. (191)

In this married life, the wife has lost everything that formerly made her happy—most crucially, she has lost the ability to feel interest. The wife has changed from a powerful social presence to

a transparent entity. Just as the wife has framed the events in her life around her husband, she is now framing her sense of validation around recognition or the lack thereof from strangers.

Eustis further presents the wife's inner struggle: "She found that far too often she wanted to ask [her husband] if he loved her; she knew she bored him by asking him (before she could stop herself) what he was thinking" (190). The problem Eustis presents is that the wife is looking somewhere outside of herself for a feeling of validation and worth. Instead of looking within herself the depths of herself and considering the many facets of herself that she contains at any one time, she continually looks for self-affirmation from her husband. The wife struggles with controlling her emotions whereas the husband is genuinely dismissive. Eustis never reveals the husband's thoughts, but it is clear that the husband is uninterested, or seems so from the wife's point of view. The wife's joy is directly correlated to his behavior because she only counts self worth in terms of his displays of affection toward her. Instead of feeling a sense of companionship, the wife feels "lonely" since her wedding and instead of having a person with whom she can share her thoughts, "she was finding out when not to speak" (191). Eustis again presents the wife's experience as one she needs to learn about and adapt to, not one that arises organically.

The source of the wife's problem Eustis highlights in "Honeymoon" is her "sense of having lost herself" (190). Eustis purposely refrains from giving her any other title aside from "wife," and the implications of this choice are crucial. For the entire story, the wife attempts to create her identity entirely around her husband. She fails to reach any kind of steady sense of herself because she does not retain any section of herself that purely exists for her. Eustis does not provide her with a first name because for all intensive purposes, she abandoned her name when she re-structured her life around her husband. The wife will only be able to re-claim her

identity and her name only when she recognizes the importance of retaining some shred of her former life. Until the wife makes the effort to do so, she will remain feeling “like a tiny child ... altogether at [her husband’s] disposal” (190).

Eustis’ launches a psychological investigation into the mind of the wife principally by contrasting the elements of her former life with the state of her newly married life. Eustis emphasizes the importance of independence and autonomy, even within a marriage. What Eustis portrays in a subtle and nuanced way is how the wife struggles with the concept of disinterested love. As his wife, she has become a different entity than the woman he met. Her personality has so wholly shifted to accommodate him that “In a certain sense she had been replaced by herself” (190). Whereas in *HSIGO* Eustis only describes the theory of disinterested love, in “Honeymoon” she is able to better illustrate the need for it and how debilitating a lack of it can be.

### **THE DAINY DIVORCEE**

Eustis explores the mental distress of divorcee Eva Harrington in “An American Home.”<sup>26</sup> Eustis presents the origin of Eva’s psychological imbalance on the opposite end of the spectrum from the wife in “Honeymoon.” Eva displays virtually no affection or compassion for anyone in her life. Eustis does not glorify an idea of a perfect, ideal household through Eva, but rather depicts a chaotic, problematic, and loveless woman. Eustis places Eva’s source of her unhappiness in her unwillingness to assume adult responsibility and love her daughter or herself. Due to this, Eva’s own psychological development is stunted and she cannot grasp her identity.

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<sup>26</sup> Helen Eustis, “An American Home,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, (Feb. 1947). Hereafter cited in the text.

Eva comes close to making an emotional break-through near the end of the story, but continues her denial instead of addressing it.

Eustis characterizes Eva as careless and childlike, “dainty and pink, a divorcee ... Her face was small and mischievous and pointed; you noticed how straight she sat and stood” (184). Eustis emphasizes Eva’s lack of competence and maternal behavior. At the opening of the story, Eva is not fully dressed, and Eustis uses her unfinished ensemble to indicate her mental state: incomplete and unpolished. From this brief description, it is already clear that Eva is immature in that she lacks discipline, order, and initiative. These details are placed carefully by Eustis as to paint a complete portrait of Eva instead of merely telling the reader about her.

Eustis uses Eva’s daughter, Rose, as a way to trigger Eva’s anxiety and highlight her immaturity and denial to the reader. Eva and Rose have nothing in common, least of all physical traits. Whereas Eva is delicate and dainty, Rose is anything but: “She was large for her age, with a determined chin” and “stringy brown hair which was the despair of her mother” (184). Eva separates herself from the role of Rose’s mother, viewing their relation to one another as a “mistake” (184). Eustis makes Eva’s dislike of Rose obvious as she deliberately insults her in front of company: “she made funny remarks about Rose not quite out of Rose’s hearing” (288). Eustis further illuminates the disrupted dynamic between mother and daughter as Rose dons the role of the more mature mother, “[running] into the room hitting at her mother, crying savagely, ‘Don’t be so *silly!*’” (288).

Eustis presents Rose as the embodiment of all that Eva fears because her birth was the one event Eva was not able to “laugh away” (291). Eva acknowledges that “It was Rose who put [her] in the worst danger of becoming serious, or even earnest” and at conferences with Rose’s teachers Eva admits that, ““Rose confronts me so hideously with the fact that I’m grown up”

(291). Eva's desire to return to the happy memories of her childhood is extremely delusional. Eustis is portraying Eva's denial without clinically diagnosing it by emphasizing Eva's fantasies of returning to her childhood. Eva is stuck trying to remember herself as the epitome of gorgeous youth, "adorable as no child in this world ever was ... If it had not been for Rose, she might have maintained this view of herself, and of childhood, almost without a crack" (292). Eustis presents Eva's mind as one that is anchored in dreams, delusions, and memories, unhealthily focused on her past.

Eustis makes Eva's fear of growing up most obvious while describing Eva's reoccurring dream:

She dreamed she was on a festive liner, sailing away. The music was playing the passengers wore leis, and obviously this was to be a pleasure cruise. But Eva Harrington wept and wept at the boat rail, for she did not want to go away, and the boat was taking her to some strange land where she did not want to go. (291)

Eustis constructs Eva's dream very carefully. Eustis places Eva on an enormous ship to symbolize her participation in something much larger than herself, suggesting the role of motherhood she has yet to accept. The boat's imminent and unavoidable departure is a representative of linear time, Eva's greatest feat that she associates with Rose. This is why Eva is crying while everyone else is cheering—she is terrified to depart from her childhood and leave behind the memories she clings to as the source of her identity.

Eustis completes her psychological portrait of Eva by locating the source of Eva's denial and unhappiness. Eustis imparts a brief moment of lucidity upon Eva while she is out shopping. Eva "[begins] to see everything too clearly," viewing the "hard, painted faces" of the women



shopping and the “salesmen looking hatred” at them (293). Overwhelmed, she flees to the bathroom and the source of her unhappiness pours out as all of her repressed emotions surface:

She had blundered into the wrong life; not the gay and familiar one she had dreamed in boarding-school, where the handsome knight carried you off to a colonial house on Long Island and all the bills were paid, and a nurse for the children, and love went on without responsibility. Where was that life? She had waited and waited, looked and looked for it, yet how could she give up her faith in it when it was all the wisdom she had, handed down by her mother and her father, by her books and schoolmates, by a world which believed in it so tacitly, so matter-of-course-ly that it *could* not be a fiction! (294)

Eustis captures the magnitude of Eva’s psychological turbulence with this outpouring of emotion. Eva is so devastated by her present situation as a divorcee with a child because it is so unlike the dreams of adulthood she when she was younger. She had honestly believed in the simplicity of love and the naïve idea that growing older would not require any responsibility or tough decisions. Eva does not want to acknowledge that her beliefs were founded in a lie of false fairytale fiction. Eustis includes this passage to make it understandable to the reader why Rose is such a negative figure in Eva’s life. Here is Eva’s nightmare made manifest, the enormous ship of disillusionment come to take her away.

Amidst Eva’s denial, repression, and childish mindset is a glaring lack of self. Eva does not know herself and makes no attempt to know herself. By continually attempting to remain a child, Eva will never be able to develop as a woman. Therefore, she will never be able to function as an individual and can never function as a stable mother for Rose. Eva has no

identity, and she will not have one as long as she continues to ignore the realities of her life and as long as she emotionally shuts Rose out of her life in the vain attempt of living and re-living in the memories of her youth. Eva's adult life does not match her expectations, and instead of addressing this issue or looking within herself to re-evaluate her Long Island paradise, she continues her cycle of denial.

Eustis' presentation of Eva, in conjunction with the notions of disinterested love and split personality, demonstrates a blatant failure of both. Eva exhibits disinterested love in the worst possible way: she genuinely lacks all interest in her daughter's life. Eva has no sense of self and therefore is not mature enough to be a good mother to Rose. Eustis advocates disinterested love because when executed properly, both the woman and the individual she is interacting with will benefit. Eva is an example of allowing both parties suffering due to her identity crisis. Furthermore, Eustis uses Eva to portray a woman who has no sense of self other than her desired youthful self. Since Eva refuses to accept that her personality must be able to span beyond only one title—be it child, socialite, mother, divorcee—she will always lack any mature personality.

### **THE WELCOME OPPOSITE**

Eustis' story "The Captains and the Kings Depart"<sup>27</sup> appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in October 1947, and it is in this story that I argue Eustis presents a "real" woman that Balakian states is so largely absent from Eustis' stories. "Captains" is the only story Eustis published in *Harper's Bazaar* to be told from an exclusively male point of view. It is from this male perspective that Eustis presents a woman who has maintained her identity, remaining independent while still being a source of support and love for her husband. Eustis sets up this

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<sup>27</sup> Helen Eustis, "The Captains And The Kings Depart," *Harper's Bazaar*, (Oct. 1947). Hereafter referred to as "Captains" and cited in the text.

depiction within a larger overall plotline about a grown man, Clem, coping with his father's suicide. Eustis juxtaposes Clem's supportive wife, Eleanor, against his stepmother Fanny, whom Clem despises. Though Eleanor's actual presence in the story is limited, her influence on Clem is felt throughout.

Eustis first introduces Eleanor positively at the onset of the story when Clem learns of his father's death. His first instinct is to tell Eleanor the news, and their phone conversation is tacit and more clearly understood by what is not said than by what is said. Eleanor is aware of her limited ability to help Clem. Eustis uses their brief phone dialogue to demonstrate a close level of understanding and healthy level communication. Clem acknowledges and understands Eleanor's feeling of helplessness: "He heard her take in the words and their thousand implications. He knew how helpless she felt to meet them" (204). Eleanor, though also in shock, understands what Clem needs to do and his duty as a son. When Clem says he must go out of town for the funeral, she replies "'Of course, darling. Shall I pack a bag?'" (204). Her offer is welcome as Clem is frazzled and must focus on booking a train ticket. His parting interaction with Eleanor is also brief and weighted with unspoken sentiment. Eustis emphasizes Clem and Eleanor's compatibility: "Eleanor looked a little stunned, as if she were a mirror reflecting his own face. They talked as best they could ... but could say nothing, [Eleanor] only hugged him closer" (204). Eustis presents Eleanor as Clem's equal, sharing his feelings and reflecting them back to him. In this crucial time for Clem, Eleanor achieves the perfect balance of involvement in his life. Though it is clearly a painful and difficult moment for her as well as for Clem, Eleanor accepts the fact that the journey to the funeral is something Clem must do independently of her. In letting him go but supporting him on his way, Eleanor is demonstrating disinterested love.

Once separated from Eleanor, Eustis capitalizes on Clem's travel time as a moment to dive into Clem's thoughts and depict the psychological stress he harbors regarding his father and stepmother. Clem's reaction to his father's death is closely connected to his memories and feelings towards Fanny. Eustis therefore uses Clem's father's death as an impetus for facing his fears. Clem remembers his father as a lost and tragic figure out of work and desperate to win Clem's love. Clem's thoughts quickly shift to fierce and furious thoughts about Fanny: "[Fanny] would want him to [look at the body]—it was the strain of childlike morbidity that belonged so perfectly to her character, the old bitch ... she had forced him to look at his grandmother's corpse when he was twelve years old" (205). Eustis provides delicate and insightful detail into the workings of Clem's mind. Clem's outpouring of bitterness and severe language suggest long standing feelings of anger and resentment.

Eustis also uses Clem's travel time to portray how psychologically stressful and powerful his childhood memories are. They are so potent that they continue to haunt him, and in remembering a fight between them Clem becomes anxious, thinking, "I'm a grown-up; they can't hurt me!" (205). Eustis uses a child-like rhetoric while describing Clem's thoughts, suggesting that part of Clem's psychological development is somehow stunted and paralyzed with fear at the thought of Fanny. Clem experiences a flashback to a childhood memory of Fanny arguing with his father:

Only her voice, bitter and accusing, came back, and it was about money, money. 'Why can't you?' she nagged, while his father—you could hear his voice simply loaded with humiliation, even fighting off tears, obliged to say, 'No, I can't!' (205).

Eustis uses Clem's flashback to demonstrate to the reader just how potent his memories of childhood and how the thought of his father fighting with Fanny scar him even after he has grown up. Furthermore, Eustis emphasizes Fanny's cold and cruel nature, highlighting her verbal abuse and domination over Clem's father.

Clem's vilification of Fanny continues: "she had no sense of where was below the belt, what below the belt could mean—oh, it was slaughter! She had a hold of his father's dignity, she was mangling it, tearing it to shreds like some savage dog" (205). What Clem remembers and fears most about Fanny is how she emasculated his father by verbally berating him. Eustis depicts Fanny as a failed mother figure because she assumes a more masculine role of dominance and aggression, reigning over Clem and his father. Additionally, through her cruelty, she emotionally scars both of them with her apparent disregard for their feelings. Eustis emphasizes Clem's memories to portray as Fanny a woman who is truly unable to provide any comfort or support for her husband and incapable of providing any sense of love or feeling of home to her stepson. Fanny has not contributed anything positive to Clem's life or psychological development during his childhood.

Eustis further emphasizes Fanny's failure as a wife and mother figure through Clem's interaction with her as an adult. Clem does not even consider Fanny's house, where he grew up, to be his home. He is even "afraid to go home" because all he will find there is Fanny, who "[has] no sense of honor or charity or mercy; she [is] oblivious to civilization" (205). Once Clem actually sees Fanny again, his opinions of her do not change much. There are moments when he feels pity for her and when he is able to recognize a part of her that may have truly cared about him or about his father. Upon first seeing her, Fanny looks "neither shrewd nor vicious, only broken up with tears" (270). While comforting Fanny, Clem evaluates the

credibility in her behavior and feels that she is “honestly loving him like a mother for at least the next five minutes” (270). However, the moments of tender feeling that Clem has towards Fanny are accompanied by criticisms of her behavior. At one point, Clem thinks he sees Fanny looking smug, with a sense of “satisfaction in having drawn blood” when she suggests the “dignified” thing to do would be for Clem to visit a minister (272).

Though Clem’s feelings towards Fanny soften a slight amount, her main role in the story serves to juxtapose Eleanor. It is through Clem’s spiteful recollection of Fanny that Eleanor is inadvertently characterized and praised and her value emerges. In the middle of a mental diatribe against Fanny, Clem thinks of Eleanor. Eleanor is the antithesis of Fanny, and the narrator notes, “Thank god for Eleanor, cool, competent, unpanicked Eleanor, the welcome opposite” (267). Whereas Fanny is characterized by her harshness, her force, and her inability to distinguish between what is “below the belt,” Eleanor is the “welcome opposite” in that she is able to create and keep boundaries between herself and her husband. Fanny is therefore placed at one end of the spectrum of female behavior, and Eleanor at the other. Clem reflects about his past with Eleanor and how

He had fled to her, guilty believing she was unfeminine, ashamed of his relief that she was, and then, over the years, had revised his whole concept of what a woman was, had seen at last how Fanny had blinded him against the sex, rousing his blanket hatred. (267)

Whereas Fanny fails as a mother and wife because she does not nurture or support either Clem or his father, Eleanor is able to rectify that damage and enrich Clem’s life and outlook on women.

Eleanor rehabilitates Clem's hatred of women and proves herself to be a good match for him. Thinking of Eleanor is a source of comfort for Clem, whereas thinking of Fanny causes him stress and anxiety.

Eustis' use of a male perspective in "Captains" is absolutely necessary to demonstrate a successful example of a woman displaying disinterested love. The fact that Clem's perspective is male is not as crucial as the fact that, as a third party, he is removed from Eleanor and therefore is able to consider her a well-rounded person. Clem's perspective is crucial in demonstrating how disinterested love and its variations affect those other than the women exercising it. According to Eustis' theory and tenets of disinterested love, Fanny does not have enough self-integrity and independence to allow those she cares about to make their own decisions. On the contrary, Eleanor provides Clem with the appropriate combination of compassion without being suffocating. Eleanor understands Clem, and through her actions, is able to allow Clem to better understand women. Eleanor needs to be featured secondarily in the story to truly be Eustis' ideal example of disinterested love because the purpose of disinterested love is to have a strong sense of self while also serving as a source of strength for loved ones. Eleanor is Clem's emotional anchor in the story from the moment he receives word of the death throughout his entire inner psychological battle as he makes peace with his father's tragic memory and faces the unpleasant reality of Fanny. More important than being Clem's support system is Eleanor's ability to maintain her own sense of identity, which Eustis proves through her narrative that accesses Clem's thoughts. In Clem's mind, Eleanor is always referenced by her first name, suggesting a real, fully formed identity, unlike the wife in "Honeymoon" who never surpassed a generic title.

In these stories, Eustis is able to show the reader full manifestations of lost female identity rather than merely discuss them. She provides the reader with an example of how a woman—theoretically any woman—can quickly lose her essence once she forfeits the activities that truly drive her interest in “Honeymoon.” Eustis demonstrates that disinterested love and control of split personality are mental disciplines, universally available to all women, but nonetheless require practice. She gives a poignant depiction of how a woman’s failure to employ disinterested love hurts not only herself but those around her in the case of Eva and her cruelty to Rose. Quite cleverly, Eustis presents an example of a woman who has achieved a healthy sense of self by giving her almost no space on the page but devoting much of the main character’s thoughts to her. Eleanor is the figure disinterested love Eustis has been portraying in various dimensions throughout her fiction and essays—the woman who is known yet slightly mysterious, present yet absent, a fully autonomous, yes loving, lady.



## CONCLUSION

What an investigation into Eustis' previously overlooked pieces published in *Harper's Bazaar* between 1947-1952 uncovers is her utilization of the amorphous distinctions between fiction, essay, and social commentary to construct and analyze the identities of herself, her assumed reader, and her characters. In reflecting upon Helen Eustis' work for *Harper's Bazaar*, perhaps what cannot be emphasized enough is the versatility of Eustis herself. Eustis' ability to write successful novels, stories, and essays is rooted in her skill for spotting seemingly disparate elements and combining them in unique ways. An inspection into her fiction and essays for *Harper's Bazaar* reflects just one aspect of her career in which she adeptly blends her knowledge of psychology with her literary talent in order to create comprehensive depictions of characters who battle through huge psychological hurdles.

In her essays for *Harper's Bazaar*, Eustis manages to successfully redefine female identity and worth as a measure of intellect and mental discipline in a medium that is emphasizes female identity in the realm of fashion and external adornment. Eustis empowers her female reader by taking daunting psychological topics such as aging and self-identity and making them approachable. Eustis frames her explorations as personal anecdote and experience, creating her own theory of identity based on the terms disinterested love and split identity.

Eustis' occupation with the facets of female identity are present throughout her essays but also prevalent in her short stories. Eustis again almost makes tangible her theoretical notions of disinterested love and split identity through the wife of "Honeymoon" and Eva Harrington. Most importantly, Eustis displays the proper balance of investment and detachment in her portrayal of Eleanor—the woman who is supportive but not overbearing, present but not glaring, a wife but more significantly, a woman first and foremost.

Eustis' work in *Harper's Bazaar* presents an interesting dimension—or split, if you will—of Eustis' career. Eustis recognizes her place in literature and divides her authorial self between the areas that interest her, creating two influential novels and a host of discourse on female identity. Her work in *Harper's Bazaar*, though rich and valuable in its own right, is still only a small fraction of literature largely forgotten, resting in dusty archives or shrunk to miniature on microfilm. If Eustis' essays and stories could be emblematic or suggestive of one thing, it would be the iconic well-dressed woman with the well-dressed mind; the mischievous smirk on Lisa Fremont's face as she secretly reads her treasured issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.

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