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Marie Stopes and modern marriage

When advisers, designers, manufacturers and consumers found in twin beds a structural form that signified modernity, and which did so in part by virtue of its anti-Victorian character, much more was being reshaped than the cumbrous form of the nineteenth-century four-poster. From the 1880s onwards, the relationship of the occupants of the imposing and ornate Victorian marriage bed was also the object of intense public, press and intellectual critical scrutiny and reforming zeal.

The contours characterizing Victorian marriage – the ideals through which it was rehearsed, the contradictions inherent in its practised forms, and the shifts in these through the long nineteenth century – are well known, and have been the object of much scholarly attention.¹ In brief, the patriarchal or ‘separate spheres’ model informing Victorian marriage had posited and celebrated a complementarity in an avowedly unequal relation between husband and wife: ‘Each has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike’, as John Ruskin famously put it (Ruskin 1905: 121). It was this polarized model, in which having nothing in common was elevated to a marital virtue, and in which the mystical completion of the composite couple was the promised outcome of the union of these entirely dissimilar beings, that was increasingly called into question, in part because of the hypocrisy of a sexual double standard, whereby infidelity on the part of husbands was tolerated, even expected.

For many contemporary critics of the mores of late Victorian marriage – epitomized in particular by the figure of the iconoclastic ‘New Woman’ of the 1890s: liberal, reformist and independent – the *fin de siècle* brought with it a sense that the injustices inherent in this model of marriage could no longer be tolerated, let alone celebrated.² Just what should and could characterize an alternative and modern view of marriage was the subject of

much debate, but by the 1920s a consensus was beginning to form which advocated marriage as – potentially, ideally, at least – the site of a joyful union between companionable and intimate equals, and based not on division but on partnership. As Marcus Collins put it, this new marital mutualism placed ‘equality, intimacy, sharing and communication’ (2003: 90) at the heart of an ideal that informed discourses of marriage into the mid-century and beyond. The intimacy at the heart of this view of marriage was thoroughgoing, involving ‘privacy, closeness, communication, sharing, understanding and friendship’ (ibid.: 93). These conscious and far-reaching changes to ways of thinking about marriage coalesced into the so-called companionate marriage, a marital ideal which pertained, albeit with variations, through most of the twentieth century.

The companionate ideal was expounded in a wide variety of published materials, popular, scientific and religious: ‘The idea of spouses as companions and “chums” ... was voiced in the new, Stopes-founded genre of marital literature, in novels at all literary levels and in women’s magazines, especially those which promoted “modern” womanhood (within the boundaries of marriage and modernity)’ (Hall 2000: 108). Edward Griffith, marital adviser and co-founder of the National Marriage Guidance Council, clearly articulated this sense of a newly reformed institution: ‘Our conception of the purpose and meaning of marriage has changed in a generation’, he wrote. ‘What was good enough for our mothers and grandmothers is not good enough for us’ (Griffith [1935] 1940: 18). If the critique of Victorian marriage was founded in a rejection of its structures, principles and practices, it was also driven by a sense of idealism at times pragmatic, at times utopian, as people sought to determine just what kind of marriage would be ‘good enough’ for them. ‘What are the elements which together make an ideally happy marriage?’ asked marriage adviser Helena Wright in her best-selling *The Sex Factor in Marriage* (1930); and her answer is, first, ‘companionship and co-operation between husband and wife, involving every side of their personalities – spiritual, mental, and physical’ (1930: 23–4). She assures readers that this ‘lasting and satisfying happiness in marriage is a possibility for nearly all couples’ (ibid.: 11). The ideal is not only a comprehensive one, requiring compatibility of mind, body and spirit, but also, she promises, within reach.

If intimacy spread its net wide in this new kind of marriage, and was to be found in close and complementary companionship, so it also went deep. Increasingly, for marital agenda-setters such as Griffiths and Wright, the bedrock of the ‘ideally happy’ marriage was to be found in the couple’s sexual relationship. ‘It is the presence of the sexual relation that constitutes the peculiar nature of the married state’, wrote Wright; ‘the sex-relation is one of the sacraments of life; to married people it should be a continual source of joy, health, self-fulfilment, and self-expression’ (ibid.: 27, 29). Sex is definitive of a

marriage, simply by virtue of its presence. But more than this, the happiness and the health of the union is explicitly taken to be rooted in the sexual relationship, bringing with it a sense of completion for the sexual subject, both psychically (in 'self-fulfilment') and interpersonally (in 'self-expression'). In its ennobling and transformative work of completion for both individual and couple, marital sex is also sacramental, a culturally determined and spiritually underwritten ritual conferring divine sanction on the participants. In this new identification of a happy and healthy marriage with a sexually satisfying one – indeed, of the prescription of the latter as a means to attain the former – the marriage bar was set ambitiously high, for what was both promised and required was not just a satisfactory sexual relationship but what Helena Wright called 'the perfect sex-act' (ibid.: 62). It was with the achievement of this carefully defined and normative 'act' that the plethora of marital advice books kick-started by Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (1918) in the first half of the twentieth century were concerned. Biology and physiology were to be put to work not in the service of mere physical satisfaction, but also of self-fulfilment, marital harmony and, not infrequently, a stable and smooth-running society.

It was in the midst of the *fin-de-siècle* flurry of concern about the New Woman and the future of marriage that twin beds made their appearance in the shops, and after which, through the early years of the new century, they became increasingly visible as ambassadors of modernity in showrooms and studios, at exhibitions and in magazines, and in the bedrooms of the middle classes. However, not all social commentators saw the relation between twin beds and modernity as deserving acceptance or approval. Indeed, their most vigorous twentieth-century antagonist, Marie Stopes – birth control campaigner, eugenicist and author of several popular marital advice books – saw them as nothing less than a sign of the impoverishment of human relations under the conditions of modernity. Her vehement denunciation of this sleeping arrangement brings twin beds squarely into focus as contributors to the drama in which they thereafter most insistently and protractedly played their part: namely, sex and marriage or, more precisely, sex in marriage. Gradually and unevenly, as the twentieth century proceeded, twin beds moved from being understood as indicative of a commitment to health and as a sign of modernity to being read exclusively as an indicator of the relationship – the marital priorities, values and practices – of the couple who chose to sleep in them.

Stopes's contributions were made in explicit defiance of the ways of thinking about sexuality and marriage put forward by the emerging psychological and sexological discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, her marital advice books *Married Love* (1918) and *Enduring Passion* (1928) were concerned to dispel any sense of the complexity and

unpredictability of the marital union, its dwelling beyond the reach of the conscious will, insisting instead on its malleability and responsiveness to spousal attentiveness, affection and common sense. Happy marriages, she maintained, could be achieved and sustained by showing married people how to secure lasting joy in each other's embrace. She was not entirely dismissive of the focus of the new psychological sciences: Freud's work, she thought, had the advantage of taking sex seriously, but his 'patter', like Jung's, 'is mostly the bemused maunderings of slightly abnormal male individuals of a foreign race, whose introspective data do not tally with the straightforward, clean, comparatively simple reactions of the Anglo-Saxon or Celtic stock mainly composing our England' (Stopes 1935: 59). So-called experts, she thought, 'are almost all warped and rendered myopic by their continual encounters with diseased, abnormal, and suffering examples of humanity' (Stopes 1928: 17). The result was excessive dwelling on the 'abnormalities which bulk so largely in most books about sex' (Stopes [1918] 2004: 10). The disturbing and murky view of sexuality expounded in these theories was, to her mind, distorted, extrapolated as it was from excessive study of the sexually 'abnormal'. Stopes's mission, in contrast, was to shift the focus of attention to 'the great majority' of married people 'who are nearly normal' (*ibid.*). The fully normal did not need her help, only those who found themselves to one side or another of normality – within reach of it, but unsure how to grasp all that it offered.³

Stopes's self-differentiation from psychoanalytic and sexological approaches is therefore twofold. It lies first in her promise to address the needs of the near-normal majority. In so doing, she offers a double comfort to the unhappily married, in that the nature of their sexual desires situates them in the ambit of the 'normal', while their troubles in this domain are also recuperated as widespread, the result not of individual failings or perversions but of an ignorance that, it turns out, is symptomatic of modernity itself. Marital difficulties thereby also become 'normal'.⁴ Second, Stopes's approach is pragmatic and prescriptive: do as I say, she suggests, and you too will enjoy the heady raptures of sexual and marital joy described in these pages. She promises both agency and success. The 'experts' took sex seriously, as she did, and recognized its far-reaching importance, but their practices were well beyond the reach of ordinary people, their ideas new, contentious, shadowy and largely inaccessible, mostly to be found in weighty books in specialist libraries and in medical journals. Their theories and treatments may have offered hope to the unhappy, but they were only able to offer it by means of processes that were protracted, circuitous and expensive – and even then, they could not offer it with any certainty of a successful outcome.

Stopes's recommendations, in contrast, resounded with an infectious certainty, breezily sweeping to one side the objections of doubters and

naysayers. The unconscious had no part in her diagnosis or in her programme. Instead, through the combination of the knowledge she would impart, the application of certain scientific observations and the good sense and good will inherent in the feelings that bind married people together, all could be brought within the reach of the conscious will. Stopes's popular appeal was, therefore, the result of a potent mix. Her anti-expert populism brought sexuality – although she disliked the word 'sexual', finding it an 'ugly slimy sounding word' (1928: 15) – and normality into the same well-lit frame, out of the shadowy territory of the medically pathological, sexologically perverse and psychoanalytically neurotic. Moreover, she promised hope to married people who found themselves confused and disappointed, offering them a pragmatic and empowering programme for the fulfilment of their dreams of married bliss. It was a combination that early readers found compelling.

Best known now as a birth-control campaigner, Marie Stopes shook post-war society with her first book, the sex and marriage manual *Married Love* (1918), a book with minimal interest in contraception but a zealous and campaigning interest in the sexual practices and attitudes of married people. The book was an instant success, selling two thousand copies in two weeks, going into six editions within a year, and twenty-two reprints (406,000 copies) in five years (McKibbin 2004: xxxvi; Haste 1992: 60; see too Cook 2004: 187–206). Stopes herself anticipated that the book would 'electrify' the country (McKibbin 2004: vii), and, looking back on its impact from the mid-1930s, she described it as having 'crashed into English society like a bombshell' (Stopes 1935: 44). For once, her hyperbole was warranted. There had been marriage manuals of one sort or another for many centuries, and since the late nineteenth century these had been concerned with the sexual relationship within marriage as a way to cultivate 'affectionate mutual regard and unselfish devotion' (Porter and Hall 1995: 203; see too Hall 1991: 63–88). However, these works 'still eschewed exact physiological instructions for rendering the act mutually pleasurable' (Porter and Hall 1995: 203). *Married Love* 'breached the dam of reticence' (ibid.: 208), using an anatomical and sexual terminology absent from earlier manuals in order, Stopes wrote, to enable 'average, healthy, mating creatures [to] find the key to happiness' ([1918] 2004: 11). Her insistence on the normality of sexual desire for both men and women combined with a physiologically explicit vocabulary culled from her research in 'the Cupboard' at the British Library made her book unlike anything hitherto published.⁵ Not only did it assert that 'normal' women felt sexual desire, it also suggested that it was the duty of their husbands (and it ought also to be their joy) to ensure their wives experienced a sexual pleasure as great as their own. The task of *Married Love* was to ensure that women and – just as importantly – the 'young husbands' to whom the book was dedicated knew how that joy could be attained.

Married Love was groundbreaking not only in its unambiguous technical terminology and in its assertion of the normality and mutuality of sexual desire, but also in its combination of these with a high-flown romantic rhetoric promulgating and celebrating the utopian potential of marriage for both sexes. Stopes had initially intended to disseminate her thoughts on married love 'not in a strong solution as it now is in one book, but diluted into a series of novels and romances. The first of these I drafted as a narrative interspersed with poems conveying one of the many facets of the subject through the medium of a tale' (Briant 1962: 90; see too Hall 1977: 113–14). The lukewarm response of the historical-romantic novelist Maurice Hewlett, whose work Stopes admired and to whom she showed the draft, was such that she destroyed it and started afresh. His advice, together with the advent of the First World War in 1914, convinced her 'that what the world wanted was not the themes diluted into novels ... but help in some form direct, swift and simple' (Briant 1962: 91).

Despite the change of genre, Stopes did not abandon the romantic impulse, and consequently the prose of *Married Love* comprises a sometimes dizzying mix of biology and high romance. The physiological technicalities of female sexual arousal are described in terms hitherto unavailable outside publications intended for the medical profession, but these are combined with parenthetical glosses in a quite different register:

When the woman is what is physiologically called tumescent (that is, when she is ready for union and has been profoundly stirred) these parts are flushed by the internal blood supply and to some extent are turgid like those of the man, while a secretion of mucous lubricates the channel of the vagina. In an ardent woman the vagina may even spontaneously open and close. ([1918] 2004: 55)

A woman's ardour and her capacity to be 'profoundly stirred' – attributes with spiritual and affective as well as physical connotations – are here firmly and unanswerably rooted in her body, their corporeality celebrated rather than euphemized. The explicit physiological description is not just in the service of scientific accuracy, however, but is aspirational and invested in what Stopes elsewhere calls a 'noble frankness' (ibid.: 60). Frankness is rendered noble by being linked to the capacity to be 'profoundly stirred' or 'ardent', which in turn justifies the explicit physiological detail. These states serve to spiritualize the body, making pleasure morally serious. Sexually unambiguous language is literally and metaphorically brought out of 'the Cupboard' and into the well-lit spaces of the middle-class home, where it is reframed as an aspect of emotional or spiritual depth instead of indicating an unseemly, lascivious or immoral physicality. As such, the physiological phenomena so explicitly described become not only

legible and nameable, but also socially acceptable and morally desirable states towards which readers should aspire.

In contrast to her description of sexual arousal, which yokes together the physical, emotional and spiritual, Stopes's characterization of orgasm bypasses the body altogether. It relies instead on a rapturous language that owes nothing to the medical textbook and everything to the romantic novel, an overheated Swinburnian poetics and popular mysticism:

The half swooning sense of flux which overtakes the spirit in that eternal moment at the apex of rapture sweeps into its flaming tides the whole essence of the man and woman, and as it were, the heat of the contact vapourises their consciousness so that it fills the whole of cosmic space. For the moment they are identified with the divine thoughts, the waves of eternal force, which to the Mystic often appear in terms of golden light. (ibid.: 78)⁶

Stopes's melding of the scientific with a form of literary and quasi-religious metaphysical language gives *Married Love* its distinctive rhetorical character, and is the basis of the promise made by the book. It assures readers that an understanding of the physiology of sexual response, if combined with study of the arts of sex and with the exercise of 'the discipline of control' in sexual encounters, without which 'there is no lasting delight in erotic feeling' (ibid.: 59), will grant access to the ecstatic delirium described in this high-flown and entirely disembodied description. 'Only by learning to hold a bow correctly', she reminds her readers, 'can one draw music from a violin: only by obedience to the laws of the lower plane can one step up to the plane above' (ibid.: 21).⁷ Sexual pleasure – of the right sort, and in marriage – leads to, and is inseparable from, spiritual ecstasy. It is recuperated as entirely normal; and to settle for anything less is to sell oneself short, to live an impoverished life, and to risk physiological, emotional and marital ill-health: 'To have had a moderate number of orgasms at some time at least is a necessity for the full development of a woman's health and all her powers' (ibid.: 63). The promise of rapture made by the book is counterbalanced by the threatened consequences of a failure to achieve the requisite fulfilment.

Married Love is at once utopia, manifesto, guide book, polemic and clarion call on behalf of sex in marriage. Stopes makes clear why she feels there is a need for such a bullish intervention: sexual desire and sexual pleasure in marriage might be normal, but they have ceased to be ordinary. 'In this country, in modern times', she writes, 'the old traditions, the profound primitive knowledge of the needs of both sexes have been lost, and nothing but a muffled confusion of individual gossip disturbs a silence, shamefaced or

foul' (ibid.: 10). The conditions of modern life are at the root of this loss – 'Love loses, in the haste and bustle of the modern turmoil' (ibid.: 26) – and the loss is different for women and for men:

The evil results of the haste which so infests and poisons us are often felt much more by the woman than by the man. The over-stimulation of city life tends to 'speed up' the man's reactions, but to retard hers. ... the opportunities for peaceful, romantic dalliance are less to-day in a city with its tubes and cinema shows than in woods and gardens where the pulling of rosemary or lavender may be the sweet excuse for the slow and profound mutual rousing of passion. (ibid.)

The utopia comprising an intuitive sexual knowledge and a harmonious sexual pace is identified nostalgically as pastoral, both in its origin and in its healthy performance. Modern marriage, in contrast, where both sexes expect joy but too often find themselves 'bitterly disappointed' (ibid.: 9), has lost its way, both in the speed and distractions of the modern city and in the cramped spaces of modern urban (or, more likely, suburban) living. 'In the rather trivial terms of our sordid modern life', she writes, 'the married pair share a bedroom, and so it comes about that the two are together not only at the times of delight and interest in each other, but during most of the unlovely and even ridiculous proceedings of the toilet' (ibid.: 70–1). While it might be enchanting for a man to 'see a beautiful woman floating in the deep, clear water of her bath', the same response cannot be expected when he watches his 'goddess ... soap her ears' (ibid.: 71). The solution to this problem advocated by Stopes was, for most middle-class and working-class readers, as impossibly utopian as her rhetoric: 'Whenever the finances allow, the husband and wife should have separate bedrooms' (ibid.: 72). Such an 'inviolable retreat' allows 'a married woman's body and soul ... [to] be essentially her own' (ibid.). However, this arrangement should not be allowed to preclude, on a nightly basis, the 'tender companionship and whispered intimacies which are, to many people, only possible in the dark' (ibid.: 73). Obeying this injunction 'overcomes the objection some people make to separate rooms as a source of estrangements' (ibid.). Whatever the danger might be that physical distance proves a prelude to emotional distance – and Stopes recognizes that this is a concern – it is not sufficient for her to eschew all separate sleeping arrangements within marriage. On the contrary, she was their champion.

Continuing her impassioned analysis of the disappointments of modern marriage and prescriptions for their rectification in subsequent books, Stopes returned to the part played by sleeping arrangements in the maintenance or erosion of a marriage. Separate bedrooms, double beds and twin beds

all carry quite distinct emotional and rhetorical weight, but together they constitute a Stopesian economy of sleep with its own domestic geography, its own laws and beliefs, as well as its own ideals, anxieties, risks and promises. In her second handbook on marriage, *Enduring Passion* (1928), she addressed the phases of marriage that follow the heady early stages considered in *Married Love*, elaborating her earlier prescriptions for a healthy marriage. *Enduring Passion* names the double bed as the arena in which the marriage is to be nurtured through the sexual, physiological and emotional merging (or 'welding', as she calls it) of the couple.⁸ With reference to two case studies, Stopes instructs her readers on the proper post-coital procedure during which merging is effected, beginning with the sonorous warning: 'The hour directly *after* coitus, the hour commencing at the moment of ejaculation, is one recurrently fateful in the love-lives of the partners. This hour, mishandled on myriads of occasions, has done much to injure morality' (1928: 116). Health, happiness and morality itself are at stake. Careless couples risk not only their own well-being, but that of the religious, spiritual and ethical code of principles and practices ('morality') which underpins and ensures the welfare and interests of the nation. The most public and grandiose of consequences depends on the negotiation of the most private of moments.

What is required to navigate this moment in such a way as to safeguard both personal happiness and the nation's moral and social health, Stopes insists, is the maximization of the bodily interpenetration and commingling of the couple. The instructions for the achievement of this state are precise:

The male organ, scarcely yet retracted, is held gently but firmly in its place within the vagina Within the woman's vagina at this time, that is after she has herself experienced orgasm, and after the husband has ejaculated, there will be not only the seminal fluid and the various secretions of the accessory glands placed there by the man's ejaculation, but there will be the special fluids secreted or ejaculated from her own glands, alkaline in nature, altering its usual content from acid to alkaline, and containing substances of inestimable value, but which science has not yet troubled to analyse and discover in detail. In these, the sensitive, very absorbent skin of the *glans penis* of the man is bathed and immersed. I am certain that ultimately it will be proven that the man absorbs directly and beneficially through the *glans penis* something of the woman's secretions. (ibid.: 116–17)

Such close bodily contact and the intermingling of what are figured as sexual elixirs must be allowed to continue for at least an hour, after which the man 'moves apart, either to his own room or remaining with her' (ibid.: 118). In the case of Mr and Mrs O., who observe the Stopesian prescription, the benefits

are immediately apparent. The next morning, Mr O. 'is observed to whistle and sing on his way to the bathroom; to be bright and happy, to have a gaiety and vitality which has not been robbed but added to'; more generally, he 'looks very much younger than his age' (ibid.). The promise continues to be made in this book that sexual joy is the route to spiritual rapture – 'The body is both the garment and the instrument of the soul' (ibid.: 199) – but here the tone is less romantic and more practical than in *Married Love*, focusing less on access to a diffuse cosmic joy and more on the physicality of sexual exchange, on post-coital cheerfulness and quotidian marital harmony. Strikingly, in the Stopesian prescription, separate sleeping arrangements are not anathema to such a state – indeed, they are a healthy adjunct to it – but they must be counterbalanced by spells of prolonged bodily fusion.

It is in the vignette that precedes the case of Mr and Mrs O. that Stopes first names twin beds as antagonists in the scene of marriage. In this counter-scenario, featuring Mr and Mrs N., after ejaculation 'the man feels that the union is over, his sex organ shrinks and becomes soft' (ibid.: 114–15)

and, instead of following the *right* course, the man draws apart. Although they may have the sense not to disturb themselves to perform any of the foolish acts suggested by too many birth-controllers, or to return to that invention of the devil – the twin bedstead, they *draw apart* at once to sleep. (ibid.: 115; original emphasis)

The consequence? 'The next morning, little details of the household, of the breakfast table, of the day's plans seem to irritate and fret the man' (ibid.). The twin bedstead, in this account, is an instrument of the wrong kind of separation, intervening at a time and in a manner contrary to the one set out in the case of Mr O. It stands on a par with 'the foolish acts' advocated by some birth-controllers (presumably, post-coital douching), both of them inhibiting the creation or maintenance of an environment conducive to the proper mutual exchange of health-giving sexual fluids.⁹

The twin bedstead is named here as 'that invention of the devil', a designation Stopes returns to in later years. In *Sleep* (1956), her final, eccentric, self-regarding, opinionated and highly entertaining book, she continued her invective against twin beds:

The 'double-bedded room' with twin beds is to be execrated. The miserable little shanties that are being built now instead of the comfortable houses of our forefathers are forcing the twin-bed-room on people who are willing to, or have to put up with them. Yet many of their inhabitants get devitalized, irritable, sleepless and unhappy, I think, because of them. The twin bed set was an invention of the Devil, jealous of married bliss. (Stopes 1956: 38)

In prose that is almost a parody of her earlier confident and no-nonsense style, her objections are now as much to do with the shoddiness of modern living as with marital well-being. To designate twin beds the 'invention of the Devil, jealous of married bliss' underscores the sense of Stopes's zeal and spiritual mission, and the utopian foundation of her analysis. Sexual harmony is a route back to prelapsarian conjugal perfection, while the disharmony of the Fall originates in part in the interruption of the proper nocturnal distribution of the married pair.¹⁰

Stopes's vision of the ideally functional and happy marriage is consolidated spatially and materially. It consists in a combination of the right kind of closeness (sexual, corporeal, biochemical, emotional), to be experienced in the marital bed, and the right kind of separation, involving the husband's extra-sexual occupation of his own bedroom when the wife, in particular, desires it. Stopes's advice in this regard did not change over the course of forty years. In *Married Love*, she recommended that 'the husband and wife should have separate bedrooms' ([1918] 2004: 72), and in *Sleep* she wrote that 'the best way for the majority is for the wife to have a room with a double bed, and the husband to have a bedroom to himself for general use, keeping the wife's bedroom a romantic place' (1956: 38). Twin beds have no place in paradise.

Stopes underpins her claims for the importance of marital sexuality with what she might have termed a proto-scientific biochemistry and biophysics: that is, she implies that her theories were not so much hypothetical or unproven as simply awaiting scientific confirmation. As well as asserting the importance at a chemical level of the absorption of the bodily fluids of one's sexual partner, she also speculates on the importance of an electro-magnetic interchange between men and women: 'I have a half-formed theory', she wrote, 'that men and women can affect and enrich and to some degree interpenetrate each other in some subtle way depending on electrical or magnetic currents characterizing each sex and mutually affecting them' (1928: 18). While she presents this as her own theory, it is in fact a residual reiteration of the ideas of heterodox practitioners such as R. B. D. Wells and Edward B. Foote explored in Chapter 3. Like them, she writes of the relationship between magnetism and vitality, the latter still understood by her as a finite resource, some of which is 'used up' by sexual activity, and which thereafter needs to be restored by the interpenetration of bodily secretions as enjoyed by Mr and Mrs O., who have wisely 'learned the secret of vitality directly *after coitus*' (ibid.: 4, 115; original emphasis). Her claims to iconoclasm and innovation are founded in part on a genuinely new emphasis on the mutuality of marital sexual desire and pleasure, and especially in a frank and joyous celebration of marital sexual abundance. But her ideas also articulate beliefs and practices deriving from, or at least characteristic of, longstanding and sometimes discredited disciplines such as mesmerism and hydropathy.

For Stopes, marriage is to be sustained through the couple's sexual interpenetration, their biochemical, magnetic or electrical exchange and emotional merging. From this, she maintains, all else will follow: 'In marriage, as distinct from any other human relationship, the bedrock of lasting happiness, of security, of health in every respect, lies in a proper *physical* adjustment of the two persons, and a proper physical management of their mutual experiences of union' (ibid.: 20–1; original emphasis). The arena in which this physical management is to take place is the double bed. In *Marriage in My Time*, her third and final book about marriage, this time more focused on social analysis than marital advice, Stopes returns to her vision of an optimal domestic sexual geography, with the double bed at its heart: 'It is in the marriage bed nightly, or at varied intervals according to the temperament and desire of the two participants, that the central physical act of marriage takes place' (1935: 62). The importance of the double bed is symbolic as much as practical. Marriage requires a platform – Stopes styles it as throne, but it is also altar – commensurate with its sacred, governing and elevated purpose: 'Marriage to-day would do well to go back to the Victorian era, and throne itself on a marriage bed, large, square and comfortable, attended by a single bed either in the same room or in a near-by dressing-room for one or other of the partners when either desires solitude' (ibid.: 58). While she recognizes the need for separate spaces for husbands and wives, this is not answered by the twin bedstead, whose 'recent widespread invasion of the home is one of the features of marriage to-day':

The twin bedstead, each bed narrow, each bed covered with sheets and blankets of 'single-bed size,' is one of the enemies of true marriage. It gives a false pretence of nearness in union which is a travesty. Its narrowness creates cold draughts at a time when warm comfort and space is vital. It secures the ever-present sense of intrusion when real solitude is desired. It enforces continual proximity, and deadens feeling, without that intimate and close contact which rests, soothes and invigorates. (ibid.: 57–8)

The vehemence with which she inveighs against twin bedsteads is not only intense but also precise. Their very form, she suggests, precipitates a 'travesty' or distorted parody of the proper distribution of intimacy and distance required in marriage: 'It enforces continual proximity, and deadens feeling'. Neither sufficiently together nor sufficiently apart, twin beds lock the couple into the worst of all possible marital worlds. Their narrowness precludes the warmth and comfort given by the easy closeness of another body, and their close juxtaposition produces a sense of intrusion. By forcing the couple always to be in each other's company, but formally inhibiting the

health-giving mingling of bodily fluids and electro-magnetic energies, twin beds enforce nearness but prohibit intimacy. They are both too close together and too far apart.

Proximity without emotional or sexual intimacy: this is Stopes's diagnosis of the affective impact of twin beds and of the root cause of the marital disappointment of which they are both cause and symptom. Stopes's recommended combination of a marriage bed and a nearby single bed – a choice requiring the means, both financial and spatial, of the wealthier classes – facilitated the periodic separation and reunion of the married couple in an echo of what she termed 'the Law of Periodicity of Recurrence of desire in women' ([1918] 2004: 39). Under this title, she argued that a woman's experience of sexual desire – what she called her 'rhythmic sex-tide' (ibid.: 36) – ebbed and flowed in relation to her menstrual cycle. 'There are two wave-crests in each twenty-eight-day month' (ibid.: 42), she contended, and it was these that should determine sexual contact. A husband should 'endeavour to adapt his demands on her so that they are in harmony with her nature' (ibid.: 47). Presumably, as her sex-tides ebbed and flowed, so husband and wife should move between the opportunities for proximity and distance offered by the double-plus-single bed arrangement. Even if 'the pulling of rosemary or lavender' ([1918] 2004: 26) remained beyond the reach of those living under the conditions of urban modernity, the artificial and frenetic tempo of modern urban life could still be banished by looking within, to the natural oceanic rhythms of the woman's love-tides.

In the Stopesian economy of sleep, twin beds disrupt the proper geography of the marital bedroom by formally insisting on the relative separateness – the enduring 'twoness' – of the constituent elements. Their disposition *vis-à-vis* one another suggests proximity and relationality, but not, as does the double bed, blending or union. The double bed constituted the arena in which Stopes, the high priestess of utopian married love, envisaged the melting, merging union of the ecstatic couple, materializing in quotidian form the blended marital relation she advocated. During the critical coda to coitus, this union was physical and biochemical, but it was also mystical in its power to reconfigure the couple metaphysically. The transfigured spouses are defined by their two-in-oneness as a 'higher unit of humanity, "the pair," rather than a couple of isolated individuals' (1928: 24). She refers to this pair 'in a very beautiful old-English word, now fallen into disuse, which I should like to see revived, the human "duity" in contrast to God's Unity' (ibid.):

This duity, this unit composed of two like but dissimilar lives interlocked so as to make one unit existence [*sic*], is an extremely important item in the social system of any State desiring permanence, continuity and stability. (ibid.)

In serving the interests of the state, the duty has a pragmatic dimension, but it is also the means to access the metaphysical ecstasy envisaged in *Married Love*: 'When knowledge and love together go to the making of each marriage, the joy of *that new unit, the pair* will reach from the physical foundations of its bodies to the heavens where its head is crowned with stars' (Stopes [1918] 2004: 106; original italics). Both the stability of the state and a condition of metaphysical rapture emanate from the 'physical foundations' of the duty.

Twin beds cannot unite 'the pair' into a new merged unit, and so cannot stage the necessary formal combination of two becoming one. These beds take an initial step. They make a link between the pair that emphasizes their relation to each other by presenting them as a couple rather than just 'a couple of isolated individuals', thereby precluding any sense of this being a merely random encounter. However, twin beds fail formally to reify or materially embody this idealized 'duty', these interlocked 'like but dissimilar' entities. Unlike the double bed, their material form cannot reproduce the terms of the utopian marital paradigm advocated by Stopes. Where the double bed figures a complementary likeness in dissimilarity melded into a harmonious whole, twins insist on preserving the two as separate beings. Twin beds' proximity and adjacency, their narrowness and draughtiness, stand in the place of merging and union.

Stopes's endorsement of the double-plus-single arrangement gives material and spatial form to the complexities of her ideological investment in the happy marriage. Her political agenda is explicit: from mutually satisfying sexual relationships will follow enduringly happy marriages, which in turn will serve the stability of the nation. Indeed, among the opening sentences of *Married Love* is the following: 'The only secure basis for a present-day State is the welding of its units in marriage; but there is rotteness and danger at the foundations of the State if many of the marriages are unhappy' ([1918] 2004: 9). She reiterates the claim in *Enduring Passion*: 'Who can doubt that the stability of the nation depends on the health and *happiness* of its homes' (1928: 9–10; original emphasis).¹¹ Those homes will be happy not simply with happy individuals living in them, but because of the merged pair at their heart. None of Stopes's books is concerned with sexual pleasure as an end in itself. In *Married Love* and *Endearing Passion* in particular, it is explicitly named as important in serving the healthy longevity of the marriage and thereby the stability of the nation. A social agenda unashamedly frames the sexual prescriptions for unhappy married couples. The happiness of marriage is the foundation of the nation's health.

So it was that the health claims made for twin beds in the later nineteenth century continued to attach to questions of sleep hygiene in the twentieth century. As beliefs about disease transmission through foul air were refuted and anxieties about loss of vitality to a bedfellow through the equalization of

electro-magnetic energies abated, choices of sleeping arrangement did not shed their associations with regimens of healthy living. The question of double or twin was not reduced, in Stopes's economy of sleep, to being simply a matter of preference. Rather, it continued to be informed by the moral imperative of making the right choice, the healthy choice, even though the health concerned was now not simply the bodily health of the individual but also the health of the marriage and thence of the nation. This connection was by no means Stopes's alone: her work is explicitly eugenicist, a discourse founded on the rehearsal of causal connections between parents' health, both physical and moral, the robustness of their children, and the consequent vigour of the national stock.¹² Stopes's inflection of these elements, however, insisted on a clear teleology between sexual pleasure, marital happiness and the state of the nation. The health at stake in the choice of sleeping arrangement was different from fifty years previously, but it nevertheless provided the motive and moral force of her denunciation. In their introduction of an unholy and ambiguous space between, twin beds threatened much more than the temper of a disgruntled husband.

Stopes's excoriation of twin beds is of a piece with her blueprint for marriage: be fully separated, or fully merged; unite in a double bed, or sleep (after sharing nightly 'whispered intimacies') in your own room; be together, or be apart. Twin beds break all these rules. They are an obstacle to intimacy. Not only does their narrowness militate against the continuing physical union of the duity during that crucial post-coital hour, but their distance from each other presumably requires intimacies to be uttered at full voice. They also preclude proper solitude by keeping the fellow sleeper ever-present, even if at arm's length. Twin beds prevent the formation of the duity, instead locking the couple into their atomized and unmerged states.

Condensed in the three possibilities for the distribution of the sleeping forms of the married couple – double, single or twin – are the essential components of the discussion about the changing character of marriage that was conducted across the twentieth century. After marriage, how much closeness, and of what kind, should be expected? How much independence was appropriate for each? Were husband and wife to be all in all to each other? Were the desires of each, sexual or otherwise, to have equal claim? Were the couple to be conceived as a merged duity or as two autonomous subjects, in close relation but with continuing independent identities? Such questions echo through twentieth-century debates about marriage. However, as the next chapter will show, they had also been repeatedly asked by Marie Stopes's predecessors, the marital advisers of the late nineteenth century.