

Intimate Warriors



Portraits of a Modern Marriage, 1899–1944

Selected Works by Neith Boyce
and Hutchins Hapgood

Edited by ELLEN KAY TRIMBERGER
Afterword by Shari Benstock

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Page 197: Neith Boyce and children, Miriam and Charles Hapgood, 1909,
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Page 201: Neith Boyce, Settignano, Italy, 1923, courtesy of Beatrix Hapgood
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This book had its genesis in a year's fellowship for college teachers from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1980–81. From an obscure footnote, I obtained a microfiche copy of Hutchins Hapgood's *The Story of a Lover*, written in 1914 and published in 1919. I was impressed that in the early decades of this century a man was probing his conflicted relationships with his wife and other women in contemporary psychological terms. I soon discovered the related novels of Neith Boyce, Hutchins's wife, and I was hooked on this couple. Nancy Cott helped me sublet an apartment in New Haven and find a babysitter for my infant son so that I could probe the letters and unpublished manuscripts in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The staff there has always been extremely courteous and helpful both in person and by mail. My parents, George and Eleanor Trimberger, provided support, including childcare, numerous times during this project.

I owe the greatest debt, however, to the cooperation of the two daughters of Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, Beatrix Faust and the late Miriam DeWitt. In 1984 Miriam invited me to her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts, to share her private archive (including typed copies of many of her parents' letters). Beatrix came down from New Hampshire, and the two sisters shared many stories about their parents. Before her sudden death in the spring of 1990, I learned much from Miriam's sharp memory and thoughtful insights. I benefited equally from Beatrix's generosity and from a perspective on her parents that often differed considerably from that of Miriam. That these two daughters were so open and undefensive about their parents' lives, and that they could both honor and criticize them, increased my respect for Neith and Hutchins. After Miriam's death her sons Tim and Ned Bright helped me obtain photos from her archives. Beatrix provided additional photos.

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Finally, I dedicate this book to my son, Marc, in the perhaps idealistic hope that his struggles with a feminist mom may lead him to more equitable relationships in the future.

INTIMATE WARRIORS

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INTRODUCTION



We tend to talk informally about other people's marriages and to disparage our own talk as gossip. But gossip may be the beginning of moral inquiry, the low end of the platonic ladder which leads to self-understanding. We are desperate for information about how other people live because we want to know how to live ourselves, yet we are taught to see this desire as an illegitimate form of prying. If marriage is, as Mill suggested, a political experience, then discussion of it ought to be taken as seriously as talk about national elections. Cultural pressure to avoid such talk as "gossip" ought to be resisted in a spirit of good citizenship.

—Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages*

For a brief decade from about 1968 to 1978 the personal became political in the United States. Feminists and new leftists convinced a large public that sexuality, the structure of marriage, and intimate relationships were not universal, natural, or God-given but were socially constructed and hence could be reconstructed. Millions of people sought to create more equitable personal relationships where women would have room for autonomy, creativity, and achievement and men would participate more fully in emotional intimacy, child rearing, and homemaking.

As conflicts arose, however, and male resistance appeared, this vision of egalitarian relationships lost cultural ascendancy. In the 1980s the media was filled not with positive images of women and men struggling to live in a new way but with burned-out and disgruntled "superwomen" and "supermoms"; with neglected "latchkey children" and career women guilty about leaving their children in day care; and with successful professionals who had delayed marriage and motherhood too long and who now faced an unhappy life alone.¹ Discussion of men's ability or desire to change their personal lives was lost in the focus on women's frustration and guilt.

Missing from either the 1970s vision of more equitable personal relationships or from the 1980s backlash was the sense that women and men before us might have had similar ideals or dilemmas. I began to gain this historical perspective when I discovered the writings of a couple who in the first two decades of the twentieth century (a period that is increasingly seen by historians as formative of our own culture) wrote about their marriage in a manner that was eerily familiar and contemporary.

My study of Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood, of their relationship, family, community, and culture, provided me with a small spur to help resist the contemporary erosion of the ideal of egalitarian relation-

ships. It is not that I identified with them; my life is not like theirs. Nor was I inspired by their success in creating a satisfying relationship. If anything, their silences and failures were more meaningful to me. Rather, what impressed me about Neith and Hutchins was their ability to write about some of their conflicts and disappointments in ways that dignified the struggle without a nostalgic return to tradition. We expect attempts to alter power imbalances in the economy, polity, and social system to involve strife. Neith's and Hutchins's struggles signify the inevitability of conflict in attempts to change intimate and sexual relations—conflict that does not necessarily indicate failure.

Hutchins Hapgood (1869–1944) and Neith Boyce (1872–1951) were central figures in a group of intellectual radicals living in pre-World War I Greenwich Village in New York City. Hutchins was a journalist and essayist noted for his sympathetic ethnographies of underdogs, deviants, and radicals. Neith was a novelist and playwright whose fiction portrayed the difficulties of creating new forms of intimacy between middle-class women and men.

In the last years of the nineteenth century Hutchins and Neith gravitated independently from the Midwest to the bohemia of Greenwich Village. Before World War I this “village” in the city attracted writers and artists, along with a diverse group of reformers, socialists, anarchists, and feminists, all caught up in an intense period of political, social, and personal change. All the villagers—artists and intellectuals as well as activists and reformers—were in revolt against the human costs of the United States' emergence as a major industrial and world power.

These writers and artists created an alternative culture, a forerunner of the beat culture of the 1950s and counterculture of the 1960s. They started the bookstores, cafes, discussion groups, art galleries, little theaters, alternative magazines, and unconventional dress that characterizes (in more commercialized form) that area of New York City today. The men wore flannel shirts or brightly colored ties. The women bobbed their hair, smoked in public, and wore handmade Batik blouses. Both women and men wore sandals in the summer.²

Greenwich Village intellectuals were attracted to psychoanalysis and began to popularize it. They used Freud to argue for greater candor in life and literature and against puritanism and rigid moral judgments. Like Hutchins, many were attracted to immigrant culture and others to primitive art and spiritualism as an alternative to a bureaucratic and totally rational culture. For Village intellectuals writing poetry, novels,

drama, or social and psychological theory was as important in transforming the consciousness and reality of the United States as labor union organizing or building an anarchist or socialist Left.

Unlike most of their counterparts in late twentieth-century counter-cultures, however, these cultural radicals were in close contact with activists. They discussed politics with the socialist Big Bill Haywood, the anarchist Emma Goldman, and the Industrial Workers of the World's Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. The most prominent Greenwich Village magazine, *The Masses*, integrated radical political analysis, cartoons, new art, poetry, and cultural commentary. Intellectuals participated in labor strikes, wrote about them sympathetically, and popularized them in the visual arts and plays like the large Madison Square Garden musical in 1913 in support of the Paterson (New Jersey) labor strike.

In the summers between 1910 and 1917 Neith and Hutchins and their group of friends (including John Reed, Mabel Dodge, Louise Bryant, Mary Heaton Vorse, Susan Glaspell, George Cram Cook, Eugene O'Neill, Max Eastman, Ida Rauh, Crystal Eastman, Floyd Dell, Theodore Dreiser, Carl Van Vechten, and Alfred Steiglitz) moved to Provincetown, Massachusetts, where they founded, wrote, and acted for the Provincetown Players to create a new American theater. Neith wrote the first play for the group, which was performed in the Hapgood-Boyce living room. The Provincetown Players produced short, realistic plays often about the personal conflicts between women and men in their group. It was here that Eugene O'Neill was inspired to write his family dramas. Many of the writers and artists in the Greenwich Village and Provincetown circle also spent time in Europe where they had friends among the more permanent expatriate literary and art communities. Neith and Hutchins were friends with Bernard and Mary Berenson, who were art historians and collectors in Italy, and with writers Leo and Gertrude Stein in Paris.

Hutchins and Neith met in 1898 when they were co-workers on a liberal newspaper edited by muckraker Lincoln Steffens. For "Hutch" it was love at first sight, but not for Neith. Friends agreed that they had very different personalities, which made a permanent relationship improbable.

Neith was a beautiful redhead with sleepy green eyes, but in other ways she was very "unfeminine." She was ambitious and willful, sophisticated and sardonic. People called her Sphinx-like because she was so quiet and self-sufficient. Although she was one of the first women to smoke in public, she was not demonstrative or very sociable. Hutchins

on the other hand was an extroverted talker, eager for experience, with a genius for friendship. He was warm and sensuous, often childlike in his enthusiasm for life. It was Hutch who attracted intellectuals and activists from a wide range of political and social class backgrounds to the famous Fifth Avenue salon of the wealthy dissident, Mabel Dodge.

Despite his ardent courtship, Hutchins doubted that their relationship would prosper. He wrote to his mother in 1898:

There is a girl in N.Y. who has been much more to me than any other girl I ever knew. We are not engaged and it is practically sure that we never shall be. She is a 'new woman,' ambitious and energetic, a hard worker, more or less disliked by all my friends that know her, and she has no idea of getting married, at any rate to me.³

Yet their differences attracted Neith, especially Hutchins's warmth and capacity for enjoyment. As she says in an unpublished autobiography (written in the third person):

Having known H for nearly a year, seeing him almost every day, she had certain convictions about him. He was a good man, honorable, kindly, and she felt one could rely on him to the crack of doom. But it was not these qualities that made the strength of the current. It was the warm, life-quality in him, the capacity for enjoyment, the desire to enjoy and to have others enjoy. He loved pleasure, he was good company, he was charming. . . . He was unreasonable, unexpected, surprising; he insisted that life should be, and was pleasant, varied, rich. By now, it would have been very difficult for her to give up all this.⁴

Their attraction also rested on similarities and differences in their family backgrounds. Hutchins had grown up in Alton, Illinois, the middle of three sons of a plow manufacturer. Charles, his father, was a college graduate forced out of business in Chicago by the great fire to this small town exile. Although Hutchins characterized his father as a stern Victorian with a high regard for honesty, industry, exactness, and punctuality, Charles was no "captain of industry."⁵ He never cared for money, and he communicated his dislike of the business life to his sons. In a history she wrote of the Hapgood family, Neith said of Charles: "He referred to himself merely as 'a link between generations of merit,' and he wrote: 'My paternal ancestors of three generations gave personal atten-

tion to the political questions of their day and my sons are giving attention to the social questions of the present day.’”⁶

All three sons attended Harvard University and were successful, although both the elder son, Norman, and the youngest, William, were more practical and conventional than Hutchins. Norman became an important liberal editor, most prominently of *Harper's Weekly*, and William became a progressive businessman who experimented with industrial democracy in a cooperatively managed canning company in Indiana. From childhood Hutchins considered himself “an odd stick,” a dreamer. He was accepted by his father, but Hutchins identified with his mother in looks and temperament. A housewife, his mother was lively, charming, and emotionally expressive, with a zest for daily life. She also read Shakespeare to her sons.

While attending Harvard from 1889 to 1892 Hutchins finally found a niche for himself in the world of men. In the intense intellectual atmosphere created by William James, Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and others, he learned that men too could be emotional and introspective. As an undergraduate, he accepted the asceticism of the intellectual life, but it was his experience with alcohol and sex during his postgraduate study in Germany, and his growing attraction to the “underlife,” that led Hutchins to leave the university for journalism after earning a master's degree in English from Harvard and briefly teaching at the University of Chicago.

Neith Boyce was born in Franklin, Indiana, the second of five children. Although her childhood also began in a small Midwestern town, it was much more mobile and tragic than Hutchins's. Neith attributed her unsocial and somewhat pessimistic character to the death of all her brothers and sisters in an epidemic when she was about six, the death of another baby soon after, and her mother's subsequent emotional withdrawal. Neith was a solitary child whose parents refused to talk about the deaths or to express much emotion toward her.

Neith admired her father, who was an active, extroverted Irishman, in contrast to her more rigid, New England-born mother. Yet he was also emotionally distant. When Neith was about ten (in the early 1880s) her father, previously a book publisher in Milwaukee, bought a ranch outside Los Angeles. Here Neith lived a solitary life, but she came to love both the out-of-doors and books. Around 1885 her father co-founded the *Los Angeles Times*, and they moved to the city. The success of the paper made the family temporarily rich, but Neith profoundly disliked their bourgeois family life, now enlarged by two baby girls. She

retreated inward, writing stories and poetry, some of which her father published in the paper. Always striving, he soon bought a rival paper, the *Los Angeles Tribune*, and started real estate speculation, but his real estate failures forced him to sell their house and most of their newly acquired possessions. He left his family in Los Angeles to engage in speculative mining in Colorado but not long after moved them all to Boston where he bought a partial interest in the *Boston Traveler* and a socialist magazine, *Arena*.

Neith did not attend college, but as a teenager she became friends with a group of older writers, artists, and journalists in Los Angeles, and in Boston she met socialists and feminists connected with *Arena*. When her father moved the family again, this time to New York, she sold some of her stories to magazines and became friends with other young women writers and journalists. At the age of twenty-seven, Neith got a job as the only woman reporter on the *Commercial Advertiser* and moved out of the family home into a hotel in Washington Square.

As a teenager, Neith already had decided to forgo marriage in favor of independence and a career. As she wrote in her autobiography: "Children did not appeal to her at all and neither did the troubles and difficulties she had observed in marriage. . . . It was much better to observe other people's love affairs and write about them."⁷

Despite personality differences and professional commitments, Neith and Hutch were married in 1899 with the explicit understanding that she would retain her name and pursue a writing career. Although both left full-time newspaper work, in the next ten years they had four children and each published four books and numerous articles and stories. Hutchins's books have enjoyed a more lasting reputation, yet Neith's novels were as well known at the time.

A modest income from Hutchins's father made an independent lifestyle and some household help possible, but it was still unusual for both a husband and a wife to be as productive as Neith and Hutchins. Their productivity is even more impressive when one considers the unconventionality of their life. This family with small children was always moving—a six-month trip to Europe in 1903, a trip to Chicago in 1904, back to New York in 1905, to Italy, Switzerland, and Paris between 1906 and 1909, to Indianapolis in 1909, and back to New York in 1910. In 1911 they bought a big house in Dobbs Ferry, New York, where the family lived until 1922. Other exiles from the Village lived there, their friends from the city visited, and Hutchins commuted often into Greenwich Village for work and play.

Hutchins's early books were collections of his newspaper essays, focusing on people outside America's mainstream, whom he met in those places he felt most alive: "the ghetto, the saloons, the ethnic restaurants and among immigrants, radicals, prostitutes and ex-convicts."⁸ Hutchins's sympathetic human interest stories were collected in *Paul Jones* (1901), *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), *Autobiography of a Thief* (1906), *The Spirit of Labor* (1970), *An Anarchist Woman* (1909), and *Types from City Streets* (1910). Later he published two autobiographies, *The Story of a Lover*⁹ (1919) and *A Victorian in the Modern World* (1939).

In contrast to her husband's books, Neith Boyce's novels were based on her own experiences in the middle class. Her first novel, *The Forerunner* (1903), illustrated the destructive impact of capitalist entrepreneurship on personal relations—a fictional recreation of her parents' marriage. The rest of her novels dealt with the marriages and personal relationships of her own generation, but like other implicitly feminist novelists in the early twentieth century—Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin, for example—Neith broke with the tradition of feminine romance to portray personal life in a more realistic manner. In *The Folly of Others* (1904), *The Eternal Spring* (1906), *The Bond* (1908), and numerous magazine stories, Neith dwelled on conflicts between women and men in their love relationships, conflicts that are never resolved in either a romantic or a tragic denouement. Like her husband, Neith published only two books after 1910, another novel, *Proud Lady* (1923), and *Harry* (1923), an autobiographical account of her first son, Boyce, and his early death at age seventeen.

Almost all commentators on Greenwich Village from 1900 to 1917 stress that its dissident intellectuals and artists, in addition to their political and cultural concerns, were committed to individual transformation and sought to alter their sexual and intimate relationships as an essential part of larger social change. Their writings and lives were important components of what cultural historians see as a major transition in American life—from the nineteenth-century ideal of self-sacrifice to the twentieth-century ideal of self-realization. As Warren Susman conceptualizes it, Victorians admired "character" defined by duty, work, conquest, honor, reputation, morals, and integrity, while twentieth-century Americans value "personality," which should be fascinating, stunning, attractive, creative, and forceful.¹⁰

The works by Neith and Hutchins in this volume demonstrate an

emphasis on self-transformation. Writing about their internal conflicts and their relationship permitted Neith and Hutchins to hold personal contradictions in their consciousnesses and grapple with them. Through writing they struggled with changing ideals of sexuality, intimacy, and marriage in a manner that helped them begin to change their reality—to create and sustain a marriage that had the potential to be more equitable, richer, and more complex than existing cultural models.

The years from 1900 to 1920 were marked by a consolidation of ideals and practices of sexuality and intimacy that had developed throughout the nineteenth century and by the initiation of new directions. Significantly, the separation of sexuality and reproduction that began in the nineteenth century became a cultural norm in the first two decades of this century. A sharp drop in the birthrate in the United States between 1800 and 1900 resulted primarily from the widespread use of birth control among the middle class, despite its being neither culturally sanctioned nor publicly discussed. After the Civil War eugenicists became alarmed about the falling birthrate in the face of a growing influx of immigrants with higher fertility. The Comstock Act of 1873 for the first time limited access to contraception and led to an ongoing debate. The rise of a birth control movement around 1910 led by Margaret Sanger and inspired by Emma Goldman, both with close ties to the intellectuals in Greenwich Village, marked the transition to a society where birth control was culturally accepted and widely available.¹¹ (The question of abortion, however, was not addressed in these years.) In their writing both Neith and Hutchins describe the conflicts created by Neith's unplanned first pregnancy about 1902, indicating that the use of birth control was still problematic at this time for this upper-middle-class avant-garde. Neith's three other pregnancies seemed planned, however, and their intense discussion of sexuality never focused on issues of reproduction.

By the end of the nineteenth century sexual pleasure was seen as important to human health and happiness, but only if limited, controlled, and confined to marriage. A burgeoning advice literature, the women's movement, and religious and social reform movements accepted sexuality but argued over how to control, not repress, sexual desire. Men's sexuality had to be directed away from masturbation, prostitution, and pornography and toward their marital partners. Women had to be able to say no to excessive sexual demands by their husbands, and women's rights advocates argued that some women should be able to reject sexuality and marriage altogether in order to

make a contribution to the public realm. Although there is considerable evidence that many nineteenth-century women enjoyed sex and had satisfactory sex lives in, and sometimes outside of, marriage, the accepted cultural norm was that women had less need and capacity for sex than men.¹²

Marriage for love and not for utility or to please one's parents became the cultural ideal by 1850. Love implied sexual passion, but nineteenth-century yearnings for physical intimacy were expressed in highly romantic—even spiritual—terms, in a language of “blending hearts,” “holy kisses,” “spiritual joys,” “souls that entered paradise,” and “communion with the beloved.”¹³ Husband and wife were supposed to be companions, but the increasing separation between men's public and women's private worlds meant that the “ideal of companionship was rarely achieved in married life; most [couples] found their relations with family and friends far more personally satisfying than those with their spouses. While they might subscribe to the ideal of conjugal love, they did not necessarily live it.”¹⁴

In Neith Boyce's 1908 novel *The Bond* (and in many other writings in Greenwich Village a few years later), sex and intimacy were no longer written about in romantic and spiritual, but in psychological, terms. Being in love now involved a knowledge of the beloved's inner experience, an interpenetration that could be achieved not through a mystical union but by talking. The romantic vision of the fusion of two hearts into a unity was replaced by an ideal of deep communication that enhances two distinct selves who both expect sexual fulfillment.¹⁵ Women and men now had comparable sexual needs and capacities. Thus, a new ideal of sexualized intimacy replaced the earlier romantic norm of spiritualized sexuality.

Feminism, as articulated in Greenwich Village, sought to link intimacy with the need for autonomy and creative work for women. Women in the Village were leaders in a transition from the nineteenth-century “woman movement” to twentieth-century feminism. The culture of the woman movement had emphasized the nurturing service and moral uplift that women could contribute to American society, based on their common domestic experience. In Greenwich Village from 1910 to 1917, Heterodoxy, an organized group of creative working women who met regularly for discussion about personal and political issues, took the lead in formulating a new feminist culture.¹⁶ Feminism emphasized women's self-development so that women could do important work, experience sexual intimacy, and, if they wished, marry and be mothers with-